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The Effects of Brand Relationship Norms on Consumer Response to Brand Information and Advertising

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The Effect of Brand Relationship Norms on Consumer Response to Brand Information and Advertising

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This research investigates how communal and exchange brand relationship norms determine consumers' tendencies in processing brand information in morality or competence terms, respectively. Study 1 tests the hypothesized relationships between relationship norms and morality/competence social cognition. The results show that exchange norm-oriented consumers evaluate a brand mainly based on its competence attributes, whereas communal norm-oriented individuals place additional focus on the brand's moral conduct. As an extension of Study 1, Study 2 examines the effectiveness of morality-framed and competence-framed advertising messages in relation to the relationship norms salient at brand exposure. The findings reveal that exchange norm-oriented individuals demonstrate more favorable attitudes towards the competence-framed message, whereas communal norm-oriented individuals show more positive attitudes towards the morality-framed message. Finally, Study 3 investigates how the norms dominant in the relationships with a brand influence consumers' attitude change in response to morality- and competence-based negative information on the brand. The results show that exchange norm-oriented individuals are more susceptible to immoral

brand information, and communal norm-oriented individuals are equally affected by both types of negative brand information. This research suggests that the different emphasis on morality and competence information in communal and exchange brand relationships not only influences how consumers form their initial impressions of a brand and evaluations of advertisements but also how they interpret negative brand information as brand relationships unfold.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Brands have long been imbued with human personality traits to create vivid, enduring and distinctive images that resonate with consumers (Aaker, 1997; Kassarjian, 1971; Plummer, 1985). The appearance of early examples, such as the Michelin Man and Aunt Jemima, can be traced back to the late 19th century. Despite the association with human traits, brand personality has mostly been employed as a static symbol used to enhance brand equity and to help create perceptual prominence of brands in the competitive market (Aaker, 1996; Plummer, 1985). It was not until a little more than a decade ago that consumer researchers have started exploring the brand-as-person metaphor to gain richer insights into consumer behavior (Fournier, 1998; Fournier & Yao, 1997). These insights, based largely on sociology and social psychology literature, suggest that brands are not judged as static, passive objects by consumers, but rather, brands are perceived as partners in socially constructed relationships that help consumers deal with different life themes and identity needs (Belk, 1988; Muniz & O'Guinn, 2001). Consumers commonly describe their relationships with brands analogously to the way they describe their social relationships (Fournier, 1998).

MULTIPLEX PHENOMENA OF BRAND RELATIONSHIPS

Fournier (1998) and her colleagues therefore embarked on a quest to apply rich interpersonal constructs to the brand relationship research. They argue that the dynamic, multiplex, emotion-rich nature of consumer-brand relationships is hard to reduce to a simple brand loyalty score that has traditionally been used to understand consumer-brand

relationships. (Fournier, 1998; Fournier & Yao, 1997; Thomson, MacInnis, & Park, 2005). To broaden the conceptualization of consumer-brand relationships, recent scholarly attention has been focused on the psych-social-cultural context within which such relationships have been embedded for the past decade (Escalas & Bettman, 2003; Fournier, 2009; Muniz & O'Guinn, 2001). Evidence reveals that the nature of brand relationships is interestingly multi-faceted. Many relationship forms that are traditionally categorized under the 'loyal' label can be expanded into a wider spectrum to include relationship types such as "emotionally-invested, committed marriage" or "equal-balanced friendship." In addition, relationships that fall under the 'disloyal' label can be dissected further into "benign acquaintanceships" (e.g., shallow affiliation formed mainly as a result of functional values) or "negative, disjointed relations" (e.g., anti-brand enmity) (Fournier, 2009; Fournier & Yao, 1997).

The multiplex phenomenon lends itself well to the development of brand metrics. Consumer researchers are now no longer hesitant to borrow constructs from interpersonal relationship literature and social psychology to study brands. Various interpersonal constructs have been applied and validated in a consumer-brand relationship context, such as love (Carroll & Ahuvia, 2006), satisfaction (Fournier & Mick, 1999), commitment (Breivik & Thorbjornsen, 2008; Sung & Campbell, 2007), attachment (Thomson, et al., 2005), norms (Aggarwal, 2004), and forgiveness (Paulssen & Bagozzi, 2009). Ultimately, the aim of the research stream is to develop a set of brand metrics that are sensitive enough to detect different strength levels of brand relationships and to

identify various relationship forms and types (Aaker, Fournier, & Brasel, 2004; Breivik & Thorbjornsen, 2008; Fournier, 2009).

In addition to the development of brand metrics, the framework of multiplex consumer-brand relationality also provides more precise actionable implications for brand-building strategies (Fournier, 2009; Tetlock, 2003; Tetlock, Kristel, Elson, Green, & Lerner, 2000). For instance, although "best friendship" and "committed marriage" fall under the same loyalty categories, these two types of relationships are defined by very different relational templates. A marital bond signifies that consumers remain loyal to a brand despite circumstances – even in the event of brand transgressions. Core strength drivers of marital bonds include commitment, love, and passion. Friendship, in contrast, is a totally voluntary interdependence and is characterized by reciprocity and equality (Fournier, 2009). Once these rules are violated, the relationship could dissipate over time. In other words, relationship templates define acceptable do's and don'ts in a given relationship and circumscribe boundaries for relationship partners to obey. Understanding the diverse nature of brand relationships therefore gives marketers an upper hand in grasping and predicting consumer reactions to and evaluations of brand actions; the same brand action can result in very different consumer reactions in the context of a different brand relationship (Aggarwal, 2004, 2009; Tetlock, 2003).

EXCHANGE AND COMMUNAL BRAND RELATIONSHIPS

Even though both researchers and practitioners have a growing interest in consumer-brand relationships, work in this area has been largely qualitative, and results generated are idiosyncratic to the context under study rather than generalizable to various

product domains (e.g., Fournier, 1998; Muniz & O'Guinn, 2001). To overcome such restrictions, more recently a quantitative approach rooted in norm distinction has been developed to study relationship norms and relationship types derived from the norms (Aggarwal, 2004; Aggarwal & Law, 2005; Aggarwal & Zhang, 2006; Fiske & Tetlock, 1997; Tetlock, 2003). One important premise of this approach is that relationship norms serve as guidelines to define the appropriateness of social behavior undertaken by the relationship partners. Among different norm theories, the distinction between exchange and communal norms has received the most attention in the consumer-brand relationship context (Aggarwal, 2009).

The distinction between exchange and communal relationships differ in the rules that govern giving and receiving benefits (Clark & Mills, 1979, 1993). Exchange relationships involve a careful calculation of cost-benefit trading between partners, namely quid pro quo. In contrast, communal relationships emphasize mutual support. Benefits are given out of a concern for communal partners' needs and without the expectation of receiving comparable benefits in return (Clark & Mills, 1993). Consumer-brand relationships are inherently exchange-like because they involve cost-benefit transactions between consumers and brands. Consumers pay for the products or services with the expectation of getting the equivalent value in return. However, some marketers position their brands with an emphasis on the well-being of consumers rather than on the maximization of their own profits (Aggarwal, 2004). For example, mission-driven companies such as Whole Foods Market promote a cause or a consumer-focused value

that would benefit the greater good. As a result, communal norms are more germane than exchange norms for these brands.

Past studies show that consumers' attitudinal and behavioral responses to a brand's actions are influenced by the relationship norms (i.e., communal or exchange) salient at the time of brand interaction (Aggarwal, 2004). When brand actions are in line with the norms, consumers show more positive evaluation and stronger behavioral intention to continue a brand relationship. On the other hand, when norms are violated by marketers, consumers show lower brand attitude, greater cognitive confusion, moral outrage, and lower intention to continue the relationship (McGraw & Tetlock, 2005; McGraw, Tetlock, & Kristel, 2003). Thus, consumers use norms to evaluate brand actions in the same way they use norms to judge other human beings.

Perhaps a more direct implication of relationship norms to advertising research is that norms have an impact on the effectiveness of different persuasive messages through its influence on the types of information people attend to (Aggarwal & Law, 2005). For instance, exchange relationships are dominated by the norms that emphasize record keeping and a balance of cost-benefit ratio. This focus makes consumers more sensitive to nitty-gritty details. In contrast, consumers in communal relationships with brands do not look for immediate quid pro quo. As a result, they are prone to overlook details and process brand information more holistically. These tendencies render attribute-specific, concrete brand information (e.g., "stores in 39 countries") more memorable to exchange norm-oriented consumers, whereas abstract, holistic brand information (e.g., "it is an international brand") is more consequential to communal norm-oriented consumers.

These findings implied that relationship norms play an important part in determining the effectiveness of different message frames (Aggarwal & Law, 2005).

THE PURPOSE OF THE RESEARCH

Informed by these findings regarding the impact of relationship norms on information processing, this research extends the literature by examining a different dimension of information-processing tendency: morality versus competence cognition. In the past few years, research has established that perceived morality and competence are the two universal dimensions of human social cognition (Fiske, Cuddy, & Glick, 2006). When making social judgment about others' behaviors, people mainly use the basic knowledge structures of morality and competence in encoding and interpreting the acts of others (Wojciszke, Bazinska, & Jaworski, 1998).

The morality dimension captures information related to perceived intent, including traits such as friendliness, helpfulness, sincerity, and morality itself, whereas the competence dimension reflects traits related to perceived ability, including intelligence, skill, creativity, and efficacy (Wojciszke, et al., 1998). In a consumer-brand context, consumers in an exchange relationship with a brand focus on keeping track of what they receive for what they pay. The exchange relationships are most likely based on the ability and skills for brands to deliver what they promise. In contrast, consumers in communal relationships are sensitive to the perception of sincerity, mutual care, and concern from the brands. Such perceptions give rise to higher moral standards and a stronger sense of good faith and fairness regarding communal brands. It is reasonable to

assume that consumers are more likely to evaluate communal norm-based brands in the morality terms and to evaluate exchange norm-based brands in the competence terms.

The purpose of connecting relationship norms with morality and competence social cognition is twofold. First, identifying the social information processing differences in communal and exchange norms have direct marketing implications in building brand images and creating effective persuasive messages. One of the most robust findings in the consumer behavior literature is that people show favorable attitudes toward and orient toward objects that are congruent with their existing cognitive structures (see Eagly & Chaiken, 1993 for review). For instance, consumers are more likely to be persuaded by advertising messages that are compatible with their cultural values (Aaker, 2000), self-identities (Sirgy, 1982), or self-regulatory goals (Aaker & Lee, 2001).

In the same vein, this dissertation research proposes that norms also form cognitive structures that influence the relative effectiveness of different persuasion intents. As empirical data suggests, sincerity and competence constitute two important dimensions of brand image (Aaker, 1997). In Aaker's (1997) framework of big five brand personality dimensions (sincerity, excitement, competence, sophistication, and ruggedness), sincere and competent brand personalities appear to catch much of the variance in personality ratings of brand (Aaker, 1997). These two dimensions are also found to exist cross-culturally in both Eastern and Western societies (Aaker, 1997; Aaker, Benet-Martinez, & Garolera, 2001; Sung & Tinkham, 2005). Consumers' different focus in information processing (i.e., morality or competence), depending on dominant

relationship norms, should make them more receptive to a brand presented with a norm-congruent image in the advertising message (i.e., sincere image or competent image). Since advertisers commonly use ads to project certain images onto brands to attract consumers with similar lifestyles, findings of this research could have practical implications for creating effective advertising campaigns.

The second reason for connecting relationship norms to social cognition constructs is that norm-social cognition association should help marketers understand how consumers react to different types of negative brand information. The relative emphasis on morality or competence information in communal and exchange norms should not only influence how consumers form their initial impressions of a brand but also how they interpret negative brand information as brand relationships unfold. After forming their initial brand evaluation, consumers have an abundant number of chances to encounter negative, counterattitudinal information in different media outlets. Two common types of negative information in today's marketplace are performance-related and values-related (Marcus & Goodman, 1991; Pullig, Netemeyer, & Biswas, 2006). Performance-related negative brand information involves consumer complaints regarding a brand's incompetence in providing functional benefits whereas value-related problems involve incidents where consumers call into question a brand's corporate social responsibility and business ethics (Pullig, et al., 2006).

The distinction between the two types of consumer complaints is in line with the inherent natures of morality and competence cognition dimensions. Therefore, the relative accessibility of morality information in communal norms and competence

information in exchange norms should make consumers react differently to morality-related and competence-related negative brand information in these norms, respectively (Johar, Sengupta, & Aaker, 2005; Pham & Muthukrishnan, 2002). Thus, the likelihood for a consumer to revise his/her initial attitude in the face of negative events might depend on the type of information presented in a given norm context. To date, most of the brand relationship literature has focused on factors that contribute to the development of brand relationships. Given the limited scholarly attention on negative brand relationships, many consumer researchers have called attention to the deficiencies in understanding the influence of negative brand information on brand relationship deterioration (Aaker, et al., 2004; Fournier, 2009). Hence, this research provides an important contribution to the extant literature by associating brand relationship norms with the way consumers react to two types of negative brand information in the market.

CHAPTER OVERVIEW

This dissertation reviews literature in advertising, marketing, and psychology that is relevant to the key constructs and the goals of this research. A theoretical framework that explicates the relationships between brand relationship norms and two dimensions of social information processing is further proposed and tested. Thus, this dissertation is organized as described here.

Chapter 2 presents the conceptual background and implications of brand relationship research. It covers the origins and the evolution of the brand relationship concept, presents the brand relationship typology proposed by previous studies (e.g., communal and exchange relationships), and discusses the impact of brand relationship

norms on consumers' information processing, attitudes toward the brand, and behavioral intentions.

Chapter 3 reviews the two dimensions of social cognition—morality and competence. It discusses the theoretical perspective of how morality and competence constitute the two fundamental dimensions of social information processing. Drawing from the social psychology and brand personality literature, this chapter also summarizes the empirical evidence regarding how humans universally make judgments and inferences about social objects, including brands, based on moral or competent information they perceive.

Chapter 4 addresses the issues of attitude change as a consequence of exposure to negative, counter-attitudinal brand information. The mechanisms underlying attitude revision, such as matching effect and mismatching effect of negative information, are discussed in detail in this chapter.

Chapter 5 and 6 present an overview of empirical investigation into the current research. Chapter 5 integrates the literature reviewed in Chapters 2 to 4 and proposes a theoretical framework which aims to investigate the relations between two dimensions of social cognition and two forms of brand relationships (i.e., exchange and communal). Specifically, this research hypothesizes that morality is the dominant information processing tendency used in communal relationships, whereas competence is the dominant strategy used in exchange relationships. The morality-communal and exchange-competence associations are further hypothesized to moderate the effectiveness of sincerity-framed or competence-framed advertising messages, respectively, and

consumers' attitude change in the face of morality-based or competence-based negative brand information. Chapter 6 presents a methodological overview of three experimental studies that are designed to empirically test the study hypotheses.

Chapter 7 through Chapter 9 present Studies 1, 2, and 3, respectively. Each chapter begins with an overview of research rationale and presents in detail the study design, study procedure, characteristics of participants, stimulus development, measures, and statistical analyses. Then, each chapter concludes with a brief discussion of the findings. Specifically, Chapter 7 (Study 1) presents the empirical investigation of the morality-communal and exchange-competence associations. Chapter 8 (Study 2) provides findings of the moderating role of morality-communal and exchange-competence associations in influencing the effectiveness of two forms of advertising messages. Chapter 9 (Study 3) discusses how such associations affect the way consumers react to morality-based and competence-based negative brand information.

Finally, Chapter 10 summarizes the findings from the three studies and discusses the theoretical and managerial implications of the findings as well as the limitations of the present research and directions for future research.

Chapter 2: Consumer-Brand Relationships

BRANDS AS RELATIONSHIP PARTNERS

Metaphors create meanings by helping a person understand one phenomenon by means of another. In her seminal work, Fournier (1998) found that the way consumers describe their relationships with brands is analogous to the way they describe their social relationships, such as friendship, marriage, a fling, or a business partnership. Applying relationship metaphors directly to the consumer-brand context is not without controversy because there are some inherent differences between people making judgments about other human beings versus making judgments about objects. For instance, people tend to depend on inferred, abstract information (e.g., traits) to judge people whereas they depend on concrete attributes to judge non-social stimuli (Lingle, Altom, & Medin, 1984). In addition, people often judge others using the self as reference frame but not in judging objects (Fiske & Taylor, 1991).

However, proponents of using relationship metaphors to study brand relationships have proposed reasons for the value of this approach. One way to legitimize the brand-as-partner metaphor is to highlight ways in which brands transcend their existence as pure objects in the minds of consumers—they are humanized and animated. Theory of animism suggests that people universally anthropomorphize objects in order to facilitate interactions with them (Gilmore, 1919; McDougall, 1911). Animism sometimes involves instances in which the brand is possessed by the spirit of a past or present person (McCracken, 1989), and a brand associated with significant others might evoke

sentimental memories every time the brand is used. Such brand-person association is often incorporated into advertising as a form of product endorsement. The spirit and image of a product endorser is projected onto a product through his/her association with the product in the advertisements (McCracken, 1989). Animism also involves complete anthropomorphization of the brand object itself. For instance, Tony the Tiger and the Pillsbury Doughboy are characters directly endowed with human abilities such as laughing, talking, and thinking (Aaker, 1997; Fournier, 1998).

Furthermore, for a relationship to truly exist between the brand and the consumer, a sequence of interactions between parties must occur (Hinde, 1979). Marketing communication is rarely a one-way street. Consumers respond to the execution of the marketing mix by purchasing products, voicing their opinions, or even boycotting the brand. Further, such activities in the marketplace are routed back to companies so they can devise their next marketing strategies. Therefore, it is reasonable to view "all marketing actions as a set of behavioral incidents from which trait inferences about the brand are made and through which the brand's personality is actualized. This important concept point—that everyday execution of marketing mix decision constitutes a set of behaviors enacted on behalf of the brand—forms a cornerstone of the relationship arguments" (Fournier, 1998, p. 345).

Undoubtedly, people's relationships with brands do not share the same richness and depth as their relationships with other human beings. Despite the animistic properties linked to a brand, it does not think or feel like a vital human entity. However, by accepting that the spirit of a brand can manifest itself via a set of marketing actions, it is

reasonable to accept the legitimacy of brands as contributing partners. Indeed, empirical evidence shows that people do behave with brands as if they have relationships with them (Aggarwal, 2004; Aggarwal & Law, 2005; Fournier, 1998). Various interpersonal constructs have been applied to study consumer-brand relationships, such as love (Carroll & Ahuvia, 2006), satisfaction (Fournier & Mick, 1999), commitment (Breivik & Thorbjornsen, 2008; Sung & Campbell, 2007), attachment (Thomson, et al., 2005), norms (Aggarwal, 2004), and forgiveness (Paulssen & Bagozzi, 2009). Given the complex nature of the brand relationship construct, Fournier, a pioneer in the field of brand relationships, proposed that three tenets could be organized within the broader theoretical framework of consumer-brand relationships, and that these three tenets can help to guide research on brand relationships (Fournier, 1998, 2009).

First, brand relationships are purposive, providing meanings to the lives of people who engage in them. The concept of personal and brand identity contributes to much of our understanding of this aspect (Escalas & Bettman, 2003; Sirgy, 1982). Brand relationships can serve higher-order goals, addressing deep-rooted identity themes in consumers' lives. In the meantime, they can also address functions lower on the need hierarchy, such as pragmatic, utilitarian, and emotional benefits to solve day-to-day concerns. The second principle refers to the complexity of brand relationships, which include several dimensions and different forms. Fournier identifies over 50 relationship dimensions. Brand relationships can be characterized as cooperative versus competitive, emotional and identity-relevant versus functionally-oriented, strong and deep versus weak and superficial, equal versus hierarchical, and long-term versus short-term. They

can take forms that are positive (committed partnerships), neutral (casual acquaintances), or negative (enslavements) (Fournier, 2009). Finally, the first two perspectives lead to the third tenet: brand relationships are a process phenomenon. They evolve and morph into different forms in response to contextual changes. Resembling the life cycles of human relationships, brand relationships can unfold through a series of temporal stages including initiation, growth, maintenance, and decline.

TYPES OF BRAND RELATIONSHIPS AND CONSUMER BEHAVIOR

Among Fournier's three tenets, the current research will focus on the second aspect of brand relationships. Relationship diversity represents a rich but understudied area that requires further exploration. In Fournier's original thesis (1998), she identified multiplex dimensions of brand relationships in a series of qualitative interviews.

Despite its exploratory nature, her insight has opened up a fruitful research area. More recently, consumer researchers have built upon relational norm frameworks that originated in sociology and social psychology to illuminate consumer-brand relationship phenomenology. Relationship norms serve as relational schema that people use to construe relationships (Fiske, 1992). Norms (i.e., relational schemas) represent regularities in patterns of interpersonal relatedness. Such relational schemas consist of three main knowledge elements: interpersonal script, schemas for self, and schemas for others. Interpersonal script, defined as a cognitive structure representing a sequence of actions that defines a relational pattern, and schemas for self and others, which are the cognitive generalizations about self and others in that particular relational context, are used to guide processing of role-related social information. When the relational schema is

activated, these three interconnected elements should become accessible (Baldwin, 1992) and then guide people's expectations and evaluations of others' behaviors. Here, this section briefly reviews two theoretical frameworks of relationship norms that have been empirically tested in the consumer-brand context.

Fiske's Theory of Social Relations

Fiske's (1991, 1992) theory posits that people use four types of relationships to organize, evaluate, and coordinate most social interactions. These relational schemas and their rules serve as guiding principles or norms that can have a profound effect on consumer behavior. The four fundamental relational models are defined as follows:

Communal sharing (CS) is based on a concept of some bounded group of people as equivalent and undifferentiated. In this kind of relationship, the members of a group treat each other as all the same, focusing on commonalities and disregarding distinctive qualities among individuals. Everyone in a community—which could be as small as a romantic dyad or as large as a nation—shares the same rights and incurs the same responsibilities. Within the relationships, people give as they can and take as they can. Close kinship ties usually involve a major CS component.

Equality matching (EM) defines socially meaningful intervals that can be added or subtracted to keep score in social interaction. This social prototype is characterized by evenly balanced, tit-for-tat reciprocity that is often seen among acquaintances and colleagues. EM is governed by a dominant exchange norm regulating the giving and taking of favors—here, it is critical to calibrate degrees of indebtedness and strive for balance.

Authority ranking (AR) is based on a model of asymmetry among people who follow a linear ordinal ranking along some hierarchical social dimension. One's location in this ranking scheme determines one's relative status in a collective and the prevailing direction of accountability for decision making. Military ranking is a typical example of this social prototype.

Market pricing (MP) involves a rational calculation of cost-benefit ratios in self-interested exchange. MP makes possible ratio comparisons of the values of diverse entities through the use of a single value or utility metric. This is the structure that underlies capitalism and monetary transactions.

It is important to note that according to Fiske's conceptualization, each schema is a qualitatively distinct structure (Haslam & Fiske, 1992). Although there is a strong tendency to use the same model across relational interactions, it is possible that multiple relational models may be used in interactions with the same person. For instance, a supervisor at work, keeping with the AR relationship, can join family outings on weekends in a CS manner (Fiske, 1992).

Fiske's taxonomy of relational schemas provides an interesting perspective on how consumers are likely to respond to commercial exchanges that they consider being unacceptable from a relational standpoint. Tetlock and his colleagues extrapolated from Fiske's relational distinctions to study taboo trade-offs (Fiske & Tetlock, 1997; McGraw & Tetlock, 2005; McGraw, et al., 2003; Tetlock, et al., 2000). They defined a taboo trade-off as "an explicit mental comparison or social transaction that violates deeply held intuition about the integrity, even sanctity, of individual-to-individual or individual-to-

society relationships and the values that animate those relationships" (McGraw & Tetlock, 2005, p. 3).

According to Tetlock's conceptualization, relational norms serve as guidelines for normative rules within social contexts, including commercial transactions. People have a great deal of trouble with trade-offs when the trade-offs extend MP fungibility norms into domains of life that people think of as being governed by other types of norms (McGraw & Tetlock, 2005). For instance, parents are not supposed to request payment, nor children to offer it, for Thanksgiving dinner. People should not sell their gifts from significant others for money. Several empirical studies have shown that trade-offs become taboo and pricing becomes severely distorted when the object to be sold symbolizes the CS, EM, or AR relationships (i.e., non-MP relationships) (McGraw, et al., 2003). In a series of studies, McGraw, Tetlock and their colleagues (McGraw & Tetlock, 2005; Tetlock, 2003; Tetlock, et al., 2000) examined the effect of applying MP schema to transactions that involved objects people had received via four relational schemas. They found that people accepted proposals to buy objects acquired in MP relationships as routine, but the same proposals yielded greater cognitive confusion, moral outrage, and high dollar valuations with goods received from other forms of relationships (McGraw & Tetlock, 2005; McGraw, et al., 2003). Furthermore, when given an option to select outcome solution, people tend to choose the option that is compatible with the given situation to avoid encroachment of an MP structure on their relationships (McGraw & Tetlock, 2005; Tetlock, et al., 2000). For instance, in a fictitious scenario, respondents were asked to accept either an offer from a roommate who will pay them to avoid taking out garbage

(MP proposal) or an offer in which the roommate will pay a share of the electric bill to avoid the chore (EM-framed MP proposal). Participants demonstrated higher acceptance for EM-framed, MP-disguised request over the direct MP proposal (McGraw & Tetlock, 2005).

In summary, these authors concluded that people often want to place sharp qualitative boundaries on the applicability of MP norms. People are quite intolerant when they perceive MP principles breaching social relationships governed by other norms. In other words, people use social norms associated with their interpersonal relationships to evaluate the legitimacy of their exchanges (McGraw & Tetlock, 2005; McGraw, et al., 2003; Tetlock, 2003; Tetlock, et al., 2000).

Clark and Mills's Communal and Exchange Relational Norms

In addition to Fiske's theory of social relations, Clark and Mills (1979)'s distinction between communal and exchange relationships is another relational model that has been empirically tested in the context of consumer-brand relationships (Aggarwal, 2004; Aggarwal & Law, 2005; Johnson & Grimm, 2010). Deutsch (1975, 1985) suggested that norm preferences depend on people's goals in a particular relationship. Equity norms (i.e., each person's inputs should be equivalent to their outcomes) predominate when the goal is maximizing economic productivity. However, when cooperation and positive social relations are more salient, need-based norms prevail (i.e., benefits are given in response to needs or concerns for others).

According to Clark and Mills (1979), people followed equity goals when exchange relationships were expected. In an exchange relationship, members assume that

benefits are given with the expectation of receiving a benefit in return. The receipt of a benefit incurs a debt or obligation to return a comparable benefit. That is, people in exchange relationships react positively to immediate repayment of favors given (Clark & Mills, 1979), keep track of individual inputs on jointly rewarded tasks (Clark, 1984), and feel exploited if their help is not reciprocated equally (Clark & Waddell, 1985). Relationships between strangers and business partners are typical exchange relationships.

On the other hand, communal relationships operate on a need basis (Clark & Mills, 1979). Members of a communal relationship assume that each is concerned about the welfare of the other. Members in a communal relationship are willing to offer benefits when a need is detected, and the receipt of a benefit does not create a specific debt or obligation to return a comparable benefit. Hence, communal relationships are characterized by perspective-taking, concerns for others' welfare, and a motivation that transcends an emphasis on self-interest (Clark & Mills, 1979, 1993). When communal norms are anticipated, people react negatively to immediate compensation for favors (Clark & Mills, 1979), do not keep track of individual inputs on jointly rewarded tasks (Clark, 1984), and do not feel exploited by non-reciprocal help (Clark & Waddell, 1985). Most family relationships, friendships, and romantic relationships fall into this category.

Building on the premise that brands are relationship partners, Aggarwal (2004, 2005) empirically examined exchange/communal norms in a consumer-brand relationship context. According to his original thesis, brands are assessed in much the same manner as other members of society are assessed—according to the norms of social behavior. Given the commercial nature of brand relationships, all consumer-brand relationships are

inherently exchange-like because exchange norms involve a careful cost-benefit evaluation and the focus is on keeping track of inputs and outputs. However, some marketers position their brands with an emphasis on the well-being of consumers rather than on maximizing their own profits. For example, mission-based companies such as Whole Foods Market endeavor to promote a cause or a consumer-focused value that would benefit the greater good. Such brands are likely to have communal norms overlaid on top of the exchange norms, and as a result, communal norms are more salient than exchange norms for these brands.

The two types of norms are represented by two distinctive sets of behavior, and thus the activated norms place sharp boundaries on defining a proper behavior. For instance, when communal norms are anticipated, behaving like an exchange partner would result in severe damage to the relationship (e.g., Aggarwal, 2004; Clark & Waddell, 1985). However, two types of norms are not necessarily mutually exclusive in a relationship (e.g., business partners can also be friends). In fact, in the consumer-brand context, Johnson and Grimm (2010) found that communal and exchange relationships are two distinct constructs that should be measured separately. Therefore, given that both norms can co-exist in one relationship, most of the research conducted on relationship norms has focused on the relative salience of norms in an interaction (Aggarwal, 2004, 2009; Aggarwal & Law, 2005; Clark, 1986a; Johnson & Grimm, 2010).

Research has shown that consumers use brand relationship norms to guide their brand interactions in two unique ways: (a) as a lens to evaluate actions of the brands, and (b) as a tool to guide their own behavior (Aggarwal, 2009). Aggarwal (2004) used the

context of a request for help to examine the influence of relationship type on consumers' responses to a particular marketing action. He proposed that exchange norms should lead consumers to be more sensitive to quid pro quo and to keeping a balance of cost and benefits. The results showed that compared to communal norm-oriented consumers, consumers in an exchange relationship reacted more positively when a fee was charged after receiving help from the marketer, when receiving comparable benefits from the marketer after providing help to the marketer, and when a service request was fulfilled immediately (versus delayed). On the other hand, communal participants evaluated the brand more positively when the brand actions were in keeping with the communal norms (i.e., no fee charged and non-comparable benefits in return).

Furthermore, relationship norms influence how consumers perceive fairness in the event of service failure (Aggarwal, 2009). In response to an unsatisfactory shopping experience, compared with exchange norm-oriented consumers, communal norm-oriented consumers showed higher brand evaluation and future intention to interact with the brand when they perceived the process of service recovery to be respectful, polite, and sincere (i.e., high interactional fairness) when no tangible refund was made (i.e., low distributive fairness). Such findings are in line with the differences between the central concerns in the minds of exchange norm- and communal norm-oriented consumers—communal relationships are based on mutual care and concern, and thus in the face of no tangible monetary refund, consumers in a communal relationship would react more positively to a brand that provides reassurance of genuine concerns (Aggarwal, 2009).

Relationship norms have also been used to explain the differences in consumers' information processing strategies. In particular, communal norms, relative to exchange norms, make individuals more likely to process brand information at a higher level of abstraction. Exchange norms, on the other hand, lead people to focus on nitty-gritty brand details because people in exchange relationships usually pay close attention to keeping track of inputs and outputs (Aggarwal & Law, 2005). Results showed that when communal norms were primed, people evaluated brands at the more abstract, holistic level (e.g., making brand inferences such as "stylish" or "classy"). In contrast, when exchange norms were primed, people judged a product based on detail attributes (e.g., "ink flow" or "color of the pen") (Aggarwal & Law, 2005).

In summary, the communal-exchange relationship distinction has proven to be a useful framework for gaining insights into different aspects of consumer behavior. Each relationship type carries with it a distinct set of norms that are unique to that type of relationship. When consumers perceive a brand that invokes a particular set of values, the heightened norms would guide the way consumers evaluate the brand and judge the legitimacy of brand actions. Thus, the framework of relationship norms provides a key tool not just for understanding but also for making predictions about consumer behavior.

Table 1.1: Norms of Exchange and Communal Relationships

Exchange relationship norms	**Communal relationship norms**
Accepting help with money is preferred to no payment.	Accepting help with no monetary payment is preferred.
Desirable to give comparable benefits in return for benefits received.	Less desirable to give comparable benefits in return for benefits received.
Prompt repayment for specific benefits received is expected.	Prompt repayment for specific benefits received is not expected.
More likely to ask for repayments for benefits rendered.	Less likely to ask for repayments for benefits rendered.
More likely to keep track of inputs and outcomes in a joint task.	Less likely to keep track of individual inputs and outcomes in a joint task.
Divide rewards according to each person's inputs and contributions	Divide rewards according to each person's needs and requirements.
Helping others is less likely.	Helping others is more likely.
Requesting help from others is less likely.	Requesting help from others is more likely.
Keeping track of others' needs is less likely.	Keeping track of others' needs is more likely.
Less responsive to others' emotional states.	More responsive to others' emotional states.

Source: Aggarwal (2004), p. 89.

SUMMARY

According to Baldwin (1992), well-developed norms evolve into cognitive maps that represent regularities in patterns of interpersonal relatedness. Relational schemas consist of three main knowledge elements: interpersonal script, defined as a cognitive structure representing a sequence of actions that defines a relational pattern; schemas for self; and schemas for others. The latter two refer to the cognitive generalizations about self and others in a particular relational context that are used to guide processing of role-related social information. When the relational schema is activated, these three interconnected elements become accessible, and thus people have expectations regarding how the self and others should behave in a relationship. Hence, when norms become

salient, the activated norms influence how individuals attend to and evaluate brand actions. Consumers are more likely to react positively to brand actions that confirm relational schemas and react negatively when brands run astray from the relational regularities.

Chapter 3: Social Perception and Brand Personality

UNIVERSAL DIMENSIONS OF SOCIAL COGNITION: MORALITY AND COMPETENCE

In the past few years, research has clearly established that perceived morality and competence represent the two universal dimensions of human social cognition, both at the individual level as well as at the group level (Cuddy, Fiske, & Glick, 2008; Fiske, et al., 2006). These dimensions have consistently emerged in both classic and contemporary studies of person perception and disposition inference (Asch, 1946; Rosenberg, Nelson, & Vivelananthan, 1968; Wojciszke, et al., 1998), social value orientations (Van Lange & Kuhlman, 1994), cultural values (Wojciszke, 1997), construals of others' behaviors (Wojciszke, 1994), national or group stereotypes (Glick & Fiske, 1996; Judd, James-Hawkins, Yzerbyt, & Kashima, 2005; Phalet & Poppe, 1997), and formation of social networks (Casciaro & Lobo, 2005).

Although there is a discrepancy among scholars regarding the naming for these two dimensions, all their distinctions share the same common core (Fiske, et al., 2006). For instance, according to Fiske and her colleagues' distinction (2006), their warmth scales include good-natured, trustworthy, tolerant, friendly, and sincere, and competence scales include capable, skillful, intelligent, and confident. A similar distinction exists in Wojciszke et al.'s (1998) morality and competence dimensions. Moral traits include fair, generous, helpful, honest, righteous, sincere, tolerant, and understanding; competent traits include clever, competent, creative, efficient, foresighted, ingenious, intelligent, and knowledgeable. Also, Peeters (1983, 2002) differentiated self-profitable traits from other-

profitable traits. The former are those traits that directly benefit or harm the trait possessor (e.g., intelligence, inefficiency), and the latter are those that directly benefit or harm others in the trait possessor's social world (e.g., trustworthy, hostile). Another similar differentiation parallel to morality and competence are the communion and agency dimensions in personality psychology that originated with Bakan (1956). As two fundamental modalities in the existence of human beings, agency captures traits that are central to the existence of an individual and relates to a human's pursuit of individuality, and communion captures traits that are crucial to an individual's belongingness to social groups. Different bodies of literature, such as masculinity-femininity (Abele, 2003), individualism-collectivism cultural orientations (Triandis, 1995), and independent-interdependent self-concepts (Singelis, 1994), picked up this distinction because these social orientations relate respectively to competence and warmth dimensions.

Although the most popular taxonomy of personality trait descriptors is the Big-Five Factor Model, focusing on Extraversion, Agreeableness, Conscientiousness, Neuroticism, and Openness (for review, see Wiggins & Pincus, 1992), social psychologists have tended to rely on two- or three- factor models (Fiske, 1993). To consolidate the literature and demonstrate the high redundancy across variously named dimensions, Abele and Wojciszke (2007) asked people to rate a list of 300 traits drawn from various personality scales, including collectivism/individualism, the Big Five, morality/competence, agency/communal, and femininity/masculinity. They found a two-factor solution, with one factor comprising the traits representing agency, individualism, masculinity, and competence, and the other dimension comprising the traits representing

communion, collectivism, femininity, and morality. Together, the two-factor morality-competence solution accounted for nearly 90% of the variance (Abele & Wojciszke, 2007).

MORAL AND COMPETENT SOCIAL JUDGMENT

Research on person perception suggests that people tend to see traits as goal-based categories, and many behaviors hang together to represent a trait because these behaviors share the same goal (Mischel, 1973; Read, Jones, & Miller, 1990; Read & Miller, 1989). Identifying the actor's goal is frequently a prerequisite for drawing inference about his or her traits because people perceive others' traits as reflections of their goals (Borkenau, 1990; Read, et al., 1990; Read & Miller, 1989; Wojciszke, Pienkowski, Maroszek, Brycz, & Ratajczak, 1993). The functional significance of the morality and competence dimensions in making person inferences results from their correspondence to two critical goals that are essential for surviving in a social world (Wojciszke, et al., 1998). First, people need to anticipate others' intentions toward them; morality traits, such as morality, trustworthiness, sincerity, kindness, and friendliness, represent an accommodating orientation closely related to an other-profitable, relational goal. Second, actors need to know others' capability of attaining the desired outcome; competence traits, such as efficacy, skill, creativity, confidence, and intelligence, represent an achievement orientation closely related to a self-profitable, task-orientated goal (Peeters, 2001; Wojciszke, et al., 1998). In short, from an evolutionary standpoint, in order to survive people are wired to judge others according to their likely impact on the self as determined by perceived intentions and capabilities (Wojciszke, 1994).

Moreover, these two dimensions are clearly orthogonal when people make social judgment. Human behavior is often amendable for different interpretations, and most behavioral acts consist of multiple behavior meanings (Higgins, 1989). Wojciszke (1994) found that even when an identical action was open for interpretation on two dimensions, participants still judged the actor in a single way, either attributing to his/her action to moral or to competent disposition. By manipulating behavior scenarios on the dimensions of morality and competence, Wojciszke (1994) created a four-fold classification of actions: the first type of action is virtuous success in which the goal of an action is moral and successfully achieved (i.e., high moral and high competent); the second is virtuous failure, in which the actor fails to achieve a moral goal (i.e., high moral and low competent); the third is sinful success, in which the actor successfully achieves an immoral goal (i.e., low moral and high competent); and the last is sinful failure, in which the actor fails to achieve a moral goal (i.e., low moral and low competent). In his experiments, he found a strong negative correlation between morality and competence construals for both ambivalent actions (i.e., opposing morality/competence value, such as virtuous failure and sinful success) as well as univalent actions (i.e., the same morality/competence valence, such as virtuous success and sinful failure). The findings provided empirical support that these dimensions are used alternatively when people make inferences of others' behaviors.

This theoretical reasoning of traits as goal-based categories provides an important foundation for understanding how people attend to different information when they process social information. Human information processing is highly flexible and

dependent on the perceiver's cognitive and motivational goals (Hilton & Darley, 1991). When people have the motivation to process information pertinent to a particular goal, they evaluate others' behaviors more on the goal-compatible traits (Trzebinski, 1985; Wojciszke, 2005; Wojciszke, et al., 1998). Wojciszke and his colleagues empirically demonstrated that participants were drawn to information about morality traits (i.e., traits of relational goal) of a target person when they were given a morality-relevant goal (e.g., confide a personal secret in the target person). On the other hand, participants evaluated the target person along the competence dimension (traits of task-oriental goal) when they were told the target person was to be selected to engage in a complicated negotiation task (i.e., competence-relevant goal) (Wojciszke, et al., 1998). Furthermore, the same effect was also empirically supported in another study by Wojciszke (1997). He showed that people with individualistic value referred mostly to competence traits whereas people with collectivistic value referred mostly to morality traits. The relative salient accessibility of morality or competence trait inferences is the result of goal orientations of collectivistic (i.e., communal, relationship-directed) and individualistic (i.e., argentic, achievement-directed) values.

In short, morality and competence are goal-based categories of traits. When perceivers construe their social worlds and make sense of others' behaviors, they form their judgments and evaluations in terms of morality or competence traits depending on the goal that dominates social information processing orientation (Wojciszke, 1994, 1997, 2005; Wojciszke, et al., 1998).

DIMENSIONS OF BRAND PERSONALITY

In the commercial context, consumers are found to make inferences of a brand's personality and image in accordance with marketing actions undertaken by the brand (Aaker, 1997; Johar, et al., 2005). Brand personality is defined formally as "the set of human characteristics associated with a brand" (Aaker, 1997, p. 347). The concept of brand personality is derived from a result of consumers' tendencies to imbue brands with human-like personality traits (Belk, 1988). For instance, Apple tends to be described as creative and trendy whereas Harley Davidson is often associated with an image of ruggedness and masculinity.

Although human and brand personality traits share a similar conceptualization, they differ in terms of how the personality traits are formed. Human traits are inferred on the basis of an individual's behavior, attitudes, beliefs, and demographic characteristics. Brand personality traits are formed based on any direct or indirect contact that the consumer has with the brand (Plummer, 1985; Shank & Langmeyer, 1994) . Personality traits come to be associated with a brand from both product-related factors (e.g., product category itself, product attributes, price, brand logo, and packaging) and factors that are not directly related to the product (e.g., word-of-mouth, prototypical user image, consumers' past experiences, celebrity endorsers, and cultural values) (Aaker, 1996; Batra, Lehmann, & Singh, 1993).

Despite the fact that the use of brand personality in marketing practices can be traced back to the late 19th century, the construct has received remarkably little attention in academic research. The common issue associated with the construct has been how

brand personality should be precisely defined and measured (Caprara, Barbaranelli, & Guido, 2001; Sweeney & Brandon, 2006). Two types of brand personality scales have been commonly used. The first type is ad hoc scales, which are typically designed for a specific research study and involve a selection of traits that is often arbitrary and atheoretical. The second type of brand personality scales are those that are theoretical in nature but based on human personality. While some personality traits might be mirrored in brands, some might not be applicable (Aaker, 1997; Kassarjian, 1971; Sirgy, 1982). Since Kassarjian (1971) and Sirgy (1982) critically pointed out these inherent issues associated with brand personality traits, the popularity of the construct has decreased since 1980s. It was not until Aaker (1997) systematically examined the brand personality construct and empirically cross-validated her brand personality scale across different product domains that brand personality research has begun returning to the mainstream research agenda in the consumer psychology discipline.

Aaker (1997) conducted a series of studies involving an extensive process whereby individuals were asked to rate a representative set of commercial brands on a wide range of personality attributes drawn from human personality traits and ad hoc brand traits used in past research. Results of exploratory and confirmatory factor analyses showed that American individuals perceive brands on five dimensions of brand personality—Sincerity (down-to-earth, honest, wholesome, cheerful), Excitement (daring, spirited, imaginative, up-to-date), Competence (reliable, intelligent, successful), Sophistication (upper class, charming), and Ruggedness (outdoorsy, tough). These five dimensions associated with brands provide market researchers with a theoretical basis for

symbolic use of brands. Among Aaker's "Big-Five" brand personality dimensions, Sincerity, Excitement, and Competence closely resemble personality dimensions found in the human personality Big-Five model. Specifically, Sincerity is comprised of traits related to warmth and honesty that are also present in Agreeableness; Excitement captures the energy and activity element of Extraversion; and Competence denotes the dependability and achievement found in Conscientiousness. Sincerity and Excitement explained over 50% of the variance (26.5% and 25.1%, respectively) and thus are considered to be the two dominant brand personality dimensions, followed by Competence (17.5%), Sophistication (11.9%), and Ruggedness (8.8%) (Aaker, 1997).

Extrapolating from Aaker's (1997) work, researchers have examined the brand personality dimensions more extensively in different Western and Eastern countries, such as Korea, Japan, and Spain (Aaker, et al., 2001; Sung & Tinkham, 2005). Interestingly, some dimensions are cross-cultural while others are cultural-specific. For instance, Aaker, Benet-Martinez, and Garolera (2001) found that Excitement, Competence, Peacefulness, Sincerity, and Sophistication make up five dimensions of Japanese brand personality, whereas Excitement, Sincerity, Sophistication, Peacefulness, and Passion constitute the core of Spanish brand personality. In a similar cross-cultural comparison, Sung and Tinkham (2005) found a common six-factor solution in both American and Korea cultures which includes Likeableness, Trendiness, Competence, Sophistication, Traditionalism, and Ruggedness. Two culture-specific factors for Korean and American brands are Passive Likeableness and Ascendancy, and White Collar and Androgyn, respectively. According to Sung and Tinkham's conceptualization (2005), Likeableness

and Passive Likeableness capture the warmth and honesty aspect of brand personality traits in Aaker's Sincerity dimension.

Based on the premise that commercial brands are symbols that can carry cultural meaning (McCracken, 1986; Richins, 1994), the unique variations of brand personality dimensions in different cultures indicate that consumers' perceptions of symbolic objects like brands are a reflection of their cultural values. The Peacefulness dimension in Japan and Spain demonstrates that East Asian and Latin cultures tend to place greater weight on harmony and cooperation relative to the culture in North America (Aaker, et al., 2001). Further, Passive Likeableness and Androgyn are associated with the Confucian values residing in Korean culture (Sung & Tinkham, 2005). On the other hand, Sincerity, Excitement, Competence, and Sophistication are the dimensions that are shared cross-culturally, indicating that the values embedded in commercial brands are culturally common elements (Aaker, et al., 2001).[1]

SUMMARY

Morality and competence are two universal dimensions of human social cognition. People are found to judge others' behaviors and make trait inferences in terms of morality (e.g., friendly, honest, sincere) or competence (e.g., efficient, reliable, competent) (Fiske, et al., 2006). Oftentimes, the use of moral or competent traits in making social judgment is motivated by the goal or value orientation that the perceiver has (Wojciszke, 1997, 2005; Wojciszke, et al., 1998). When the perceivers are relational-

[1] Although Competence isn't shown as one of the Spanish brand personality dimension, the competence attributes are included in the Sophistication dimension of Spanish brand personality.

directed, they tend to evaluate others along relation-oriented morality traits; on the other hand, when the perceivers are self-directed, they are prone to interpret others' behaviors in competence terms (Wojciszke, 1997). This results in different evaluations, and different inferences could be drawn from an identical behavior among different people (Wojciszke, 1994). In other words, people's sensitivity to morality or competence information is contingent upon their goal of social information processing.

In the commercial setting, brands, like people, can be described with human-like personalities (Plummer, 1985). Consumers evaluate brands through their direct or indirect contact with products, and consumers draw inferences from a brand's image through various brand-related information channels (e.g., Web sites, marketing messages, word of mouth) (Aaker, 1997). American consumers' perceptions of brands fall into five dimensions—Sincerity (down-to-earth, honest, wholesome, cheerful), Excitement (daring, spirited, imaginative, up-to-date), Competence (reliable, intelligent, successful), Sophistication (upper class, charming), and Ruggedness (outdoorsy, tough). Among these dimensions, the first three dimensions are related to human personality descriptors and statistically explain most of the variance in brand perception (Aaker, 1997).

Relating brand personality to human personality, the sincerity and competence dimensions of brand personality resemble the morality and competence dimensions of human personality traits. Thus, when judging brands as social partners, consumers' morality or competence information processing goals should influence the relative accessibility to competent or sincere brand traits when making brand inferences (Johar, et al., 2005).

Chapter 4: Attitude Change and Resistance

Consumer preferences for brands are often based on personal experiences, advertising, or other marketing actions. In a competitive market, consumers may be frequently exposed to information that is inconsistent with their preferences, such as contradicting product reviews on review websites or comparative advertising created by competing brands. As a result, consumers need to repeatedly evaluate the same attitude target given the information they receive. Thus, because of the potential for practical implication, a substantial amount of scholarly attention has been devoted to how consumers deal with a mixture of information when forming or updating their evaluations of brands. The following literature review is organized such that it first gives an overview of conditions under which attitudes are susceptible to changes and then reviews various factors that contribute to attitude resistance.

ATTITUDE CHANGE

Persuasion researchers have long assumed that different types of arguments would have different effects on attitude change (McGuire, 1968). Recently, research has found that the argument types tend to interact with the basis of attitudes to determine attitude change, and two conflicting findings—matching effect and mismatching effect – have been used to explicate such interaction. In this section, matching effect and mismatching effect are both reviewed.

Matching Effect

A significant body of research has focused on how alignment, or matching, of the basis of an attitude with the content of a counterattitudinal message influences attitude change. Much of this research has drawn a distinction between the basis of affective or cognitive attitudes and the matching or mismatching persuasion appeal (e.g., Edwards, 1990; Millar & Millar, 1990; Petty & Wegener, 1998). Attitudes are generally conceptualized as consisting of two underlying structures—affect and cognition (e.g., Cacioppo, Petty, & Geen, 1989; Fabrigar & Petty, 1999; Insko & Schopler, 1967; Zajonc & Markus, 1982). Affect typically refers to the positive and/or negative feelings and emotions that an individual associates with an attitude object. The term cognition has generally been used to describe beliefs about positive and/or negative attributes of an attitude object (Breckler, 1984). Empirical research has confirmed that people differentiate between attitude-relevant affect and cognition, and both structures have been found to independently influence the formation of attitudes (Bagozzi, 1978; Breckler, 1984). Within the literature on attitudes, persuasive appeals can be classified as affective or cognitive in nature, and these two appeals each have a corresponding impact on the formation of affective or cognitive-based attitudes (Batra & Ray, 1986; Eagly, Mladinic, & Otto, 1994).

More recently, using the affect/cognition distinction, attitude researchers have become interested in whether the affective and cognitive bases of attitudes influence susceptibility to affectively and cognitively based counterattitudinal information (Edwards, 1990; Edwards & von Hippel, 1995; Fabrigar & Petty, 1999; Millar & Millar,

1990; Millar & Tesser, 1992). Most studies have demonstrated a matching effect such that an attitude undergoes greater revision when there is a match between the basis of the attitude and the content of the counterattitudinal content (Edwards, 1990; Edwards & von Hippel, 1995; Fabrigar & Petty, 1999). For instance, in a series of studies, Edwards and her colleagues (Edwards, 1990; Edwards & von Hippel, 1995) exposed their participants to novel attitude objects that were either affective (e.g., taste a pleasant-tasting beverage) or cognitive (e.g., read positive information about health benefits of the beverage) in nature. They then attempted to change these initial attitudes using persuasion that was predominately affective (e.g., smell the odor of the beverage that is said to occur after placing the beverage in room temperature for a while) or cognitive (e.g., negative health information). Their results uniformly suggested that persuasive appeals tend to be more effective when the nature of the appeal matches rather than mismatches the basis of the attitude (Edwards & von Hippel, 1995).

Pham and Muthukrishnan (2002) extended the matching principle to brand positioning and attitude revision relating to negative brand information. They presented a "search-and-alignment" model that goes further toward explaining the process of judgment revision when the new incoming challenge information aligns (matches) or does not align (mismatches) with the basis of prior evaluation. Their model proposes that when people receive new information that challenges their prior attitudes, they first engage in an active memory search that supports their prior attitude. Upon retrieval, they use proattitudinal information not only to defend the prior attitude but also to evaluate the diagnosticity of the new damage. In other words, people mentally compare the new

attitude-inconsistent information with the accessible proattitudinal information. When all else is equal, the content of counterattitudinal information that is alignable with the content of existing attitudes is likely to be considered diagnostic (Pham & Muthukrishnan, 2002; Zhang & Markman, 1998), generate further elaboration (Fabrigar & Petty, 1999; Petty & Wegener, 1998), and receive disproportionate weight in revising their judgment (Markman & Medin, 1995; Muthukrishnan, Pham, & Mungale, 1999).

According to Pham and Muthukrishnan (2002), the structural alignment (or 'commensurability') of attitude revision is not restricted to affective or cognitive appeals only. The commensurability principle can be extended to information pertaining to different features of the attitude objects. For instance, Pham and Muthukrishnan (2002) found that when brand positioning (attribute-specific vs. abstract) and counterattitudinal information (attribute-specific vs. abstract challenges) were paired, people perceived the counterattitudinal information as more diagnostic and responded with greater revision of their brand attitudes than when the brand positioning and challenge were not aligned with each other.

Built on the basis of search-and-alignment processes, Johar et al. (2005) demonstrated the dynamic processes underlying consumers' brand image revisions. In their manipulation of brand personality, they first led the participants to form initial brand impressions after reading the description of a fictitious brand (e.g., sophisticated brand personality). Then, these individuals were presented with negative brand trait associations. The results showed that when the brand personality information (e.g., sophistication) was accessible cognitively, individuals were more likely to revise their

brand inferences when the new incoming brand trait information had a direct negative implication to the initial perceived brand personality (e.g., cheap) than when the trait information was not aligned (Johar, et al., 2005).

Mismatching Effect

Despite the robust findings of a matching (i.e., alignment or commensurability) effect, some studies found a mismatching effect in which attitudes are more susceptible to persuasive appeals that mismatch their prior attitudinal basis (Millar & Millar, 1990). For instance, Millar and Millar (1990) found that affective-based (cognitive-based) attitudes were more susceptible to cognitive (affective) appeals. Their explanation for mismatching is based on the notion that when a persuasive appeal directly matches the underlying nature of the attitude, this threatens the way in which the person has typically thought about the attitude object and therefore challenges the adequacy of the person's evaluation (Millar & Millar, 1990). This threat could motivate people to engage in defensive processing in order to counterargue the message. Consequently, a matching message could lead to less attitude revision (Millar & Millar, 1990; Millar & Tesser, 1992).

Empirical support for the mismatching effects mainly comes from three experiments conducted by Millar and Millar (1990). For instance, in their studies, participants' attitudes toward different beverages were classified as primarily affective or cognitive based on their rankings of the top 3 of a set of 16 statements of feelings and beliefs that best described their reaction to each target beverage. Participants who endorsed statements of feelings for at least two of their three responses were classified as

having affective attitudes, and participants who endorsed statements of belief for at least two out of their three responses were classified as having cognitive attitudes. In a separate session, participants were exposed to counterattitudinal information for each of the target beverages. Half of the participants received a message that contained emotional reasons for liking or disliking the beverage (affect condition), whereas the other half received a message indicating the rational reasons for liking or disliking the beverages (cognition condition). Their results showed that rational arguments tended to produce greater attitude change for people whose attitudes were cognition-based. In contrast, emotional arguments resulted in more attitude change when attitudes were affective in nature (Millar & Millar, 1990).

To consolidate the discrepant literature, some researchers attempted to propose an integrated view by investigating conditions under which a matching or mismatching effect occurs. It has been proposed that matching and mismatching effects occur under different conditions, and attitude strength is the potential moderator. For instance, Pullig, Netemeyer, and Biswwas (2006) extended the matching effect model by including attitude certainty as a moderator. In two different studies, they demonstrated that when the counterattitudinal information matched (or was 'aligned') with the initial brand positioning, there was a more pronounced effect on attitude revision for people who had low attitude strength. However, when attitude strength was high, the alignment effect was reversed. Their findings suggest the mismatching information results in higher attitude change than the matching information for people who have stronger attitudes. Their explanation for such patterns was based on the notion that when counterattitudinal

information is aligned with the basis of existing attitude, the information is considered to be diagnostic and thus receives extensive elaboration; however, the valence of the message elaboration is different for people with strong attitudes versus people with weaker attitudes. For people with strong attitudes, when the negative information aligns with their attitudes, they tend to engage in defensive, negative elaboration to counteraruge the challenging information in the service of protecting their established attitudes (Johar, Maheswaran, & Peracchio, 2006) (see the next section for more details in attitude resistance). These individuals are less defensive when the challenging information mismatches the basis of their attitudes because mismatched persuasion is hard to counterargue due to its novelty. Conversely, for people with weak attitudes, when the negative information aligns with the basis of their attitude, increased message elaboration is likely to occur in favor of the negative information due to its diagnosticity. Under conditions of low attitude strength, people are not motivated to engage in biased processing, and they are more willing to accept the new negative information (Fabrigar & Petty, 1999; Pullig, et al., 2006).

RESISTANCE AND PERSISTENCE PROCESSES IN ATTITUDE CHANGE

There is a general consensus among scholars that strong attitudes are harder to change than weak attitudes, and there are various variables associated with attitude strength (Eagly & Chaiken, 1993). Some strength variables have been defined in motivational terms and others have been defined in cognitive terms because attitude resistance is assumed to have motivational and cognitive bases.

Cognitive-based Attitude Resistance

From a cognitive standpoint, attitudes are more resistant to challenges when (1) the initial attitude is based on a large amount of proattitudinal information (Wood, 1982), (2) the proattitudinal information has been mentally rehearsed repeatedly (McGuire, 1964), and the proattitudinal information has been elaborated on (Haugtvedt & Wegener, 1994), and the proattitudinal information has been learned without interference (Muthukrishnan, Pham, & Mungale, 2001). Sheer amount, rehearsal, elaboration, and absence of interference all contribute to developing strong attitude. Furthermore, the 'embeddedness' of an attitude within a larger knowledge structure is also a determinant of attitude resistance. Important attitudes and beliefs are usually the ones that central to the definition of self (e.g., self-esteem). Thus, for these attitudes, their resistance is due to the extensiveness of the knowledge structures within which these attitudes are situated: "Change in such an attitude would be disruptive because it would tend to induce a chain reaction of interrelated changes in associated cognitions" (Eagly and Chaiken, 1993, p. 584). For instance, Markus (1977) empirically demonstrated that information that is inconsistent with a person's self-schema (i.e., deep-seated self-knowledge structure) receives greater resistance (Markus, 1977). She found that people who were independent schematic, when encountering information that suggested they were otherwise (i.e., they were susceptible to social influence), tended to show stronger disagreements or disbeliefs about the disconfirming information than people who were aschematic.

From the cognitive perspective, attitude strength affects attitude resistance through the accessibility of attitude-relevant information from memory. Lavine et al.

(1998) provided some insights on the processing mechanisms employed by people with strong and weak attitudes in response to new information. According to Lavine and his associates, people with strong (vs. weak) attitudes possess a large amount of chronically accessible knowledge about the attitude object. Under strong attitudes, the easy and reliable accessibility of chronic information dilutes the impact of the contextually activated disconfirming information. Since chronically accessible beliefs are context independent, strong attitudes are less likely than weak attitudes to succumb to context effects (Tourangeau & Rasinski, 1988). In contrast, people with weak attitudes do not have an associated set of beliefs that can be readily activated. Hence, they are likely to utilize new information provided in the external context.

Motivational-based Attitude Resistance

From a motivational standpoint, commitment has been identified as one of the key dimensions of attitude strength (Pomerantz, Chaiken, & Tordesillas, 1995). Commitment is seen as an enhanced desire to hold a particular attitude (Pomerantz, et al., 1995), "the pledging or binding of the individual to behavioral acts" (Keisler, 1971, p.30), and stems from association between a consumer's attitude and a public behavior supporting their stand (Ahluwalia, 2000). Motivation typically affects reasoning through reliance on a biased set of defensive cognitive processes, such as selective processing. For instance, Agrawal and Maheswaran (2005) examined the selective use of heuristic cues under motivated reasoning in the context of outcome bias. While past research has documented that the use of heuristic cues is attenuated under high motivation, Agrawal and

Maheswaran (2005) showed that motivated reasoning results in a selective use of heuristic cues if these cues are consistent with the motivation.

Ahluwalia (2000) provides a more comprehensive framework including three different psychological processes underlying attitude resistance among consumers who are committed to the attitude target (e.g., brands): biased assimilation, relative weighting, and minimization of impact. The first mechanism— biased assimilation—usually serves as the first line of defense and has been extensively investigated in past research (Eagly & Chaiken, 1995; Haugtvedt, Schumann, Schneier, & Warren, 1994; Kunda, 1990; Lord, Ross, & Lepper, 1979). Processes such as source derogation, argument scrutiny, and biased memory search belong to this mechanism (Ahluwalia, 2000). Committed consumers are more likely to conduct a biased memory search to find past behaviors that can support their existing attitudes (Kunda, 1990). Furthermore, these individuals tend to scrutinize counterattitudinal information more critically than proattitudinal information, thereby discrediting its validity (Ditto & Lopez, 1992). Thus, biased assimilation processes are likely to lead to counterargumentation when consumers are exposed to counterattitudinal information, resulting in attitude resistance (Eagly & Chaiken, 1995; Haugtvedt, et al., 1994).

When the first defensive mechanism fails and the validity of the information has to be accepted (e.g., counterattitudinal information is found to be factual and strong), then consumers direct their attention toward a careful consideration of the implications and relative importance of the counterattitudinal information in contrast to their original attitude (Ditto & Lopez, 1992). At this stage, committed individuals can reduce the

importance of the counterattitudinal information via two main processes: individuals can decrease the weight of the newly-formed inconsistent cognition when evaluating the situation, or they can increase the weight given to the initial attitude (Festinger, 1957). In other words, committed individuals are likely to exhibit a consistency bias by increasing the weight of attitude-consistent information and reducing the weight given to attribute(s) that have changed as a result of exposure to the negative, counterattitudinal information.

Lastly, committed individuals may engage in processes that minimize the spillover impact of counterattitudinal information (Ahluwalia, 2000). Past consumer research has demonstrated that when individuals are presented with information about an attribute, they are likely to spontaneously draw inferences relating to other attributes associated with it (e.g., sophisticated, elegant, and beautiful are related attributes), and thus a spillover of the negative information would be most likely for attributes highly correlated to the target attribute. (Broniarczyk & Alba, 1994). However, according to Ahluwalia (2000), committed consumers are more likely to defend their attitude position by insulating the attacked attribute and exhibiting a restraint in their inferences, thus decreasing the spillover impact of the negative information.

SUMMARY

Generally speaking, strong attitudes are more difficult to change than weak attitudes (Eagly & Chaiken, 1993). When an attitude is weak or at its forming stage, counterattitudinal information is likely to lead to attitude revision 1) when the target of the counterattitudinal information is accessible in memory, and 2) when the counterattitudinal information is alignable (i.e., compatible or commensurable) with the

basis of the initial attitude (i.e., the new counterattitudinal information should share a common dimension with prior proattitudinal experience) (Fabrigar & Petty, 1999; Pham & Muthukrishnan, 2002). Empirical evidence has shown that when the types of information used for brand positioning (e.g., attribute-specific vs. abstract) and the types of counterattitudinal information (e.g., attribute-specific vs. abstract challenges) are aligned, consumers perceive the challenging information as more diagnostic and respond with greater revision of the brand attitudes than when positioning and challenges are not aligned (Pham & Muthukrishnan, 2002).

In contrast, consumers with strong attitudes show more resistance to counterattitudinal information because such information threatens their motives or their established cognitive structures (Kunda, 1990; Petty & Cacioppo, 1986). Strong attitudes are associated with a number of attitude strength factors, such as message elaboration (Haugtvedt & Wegener, 1994), the amount of prior knowledge (Wood, 1982), the importance and embeddedness of the attitude within the knowledge structure, or the level of commitment to the attitude objects (e.g., brands) (Keisler, 1971; Pomerantz, et al., 1995). When facing counterattitudinal information, committed consumers could employ various resistance processes. For instance, people who hold strong attitudes are more likely to resort to the proattitudinal information cognitively (Lavine, et al., 1998), and they are more likely to engage in defensive, biased information processing that would yield attitude-consistent conclusions (Ahluwalia, 2000). Past research also suggests that attitude resistance resulting from the defensive, biased information processing only occurs for people with strong attitudes when the new negative information aligns with the

basis of the existing attitude. For these individuals, when the negative information mismatches the foundation of attitudes, attitude revision is likely to occur because such mismatched persuasion is hard to counterargue due to its novelty to the consumers. In addition, the mismatched negative information is perceived to be less threatening because it only requires linking a new basis to the attitude rather than replacing the basis of the existing attitude (Fabrigar & Petty, 1999; Pullig, et al., 2006).

Chapter 5: Hypothesis Development

Recent consumer research has noted that consumers relate to brands in ways that mirror their relationships with people in social contexts. In her seminal work, Fournier (1998) found that the way consumers describe their relationships with brands is analogous to the way they describe their social relationships, such as friendship, marriage, a fling, or a business partnership. Following the distinction made in social psychology literature, consumer researchers found that different brand relationships can also be loosely categorized into two main forms: exchange and communal (Aggarwal, 2004; Aggarwal & Law, 2005). The distinction between communal and exchange relationships lies in the norms that govern giving and receiving benefits. Exchange relationships involve a careful calculation of cost-benefit trading between partners, namely quid pro quo. In contrast, communal relationships emphasize mutual support. Benefits are given out of a caring or concern for communal partners' needs and without the expectation of receiving comparable benefits in return (Clark & Mills, 1993). The construct validity of communal and exchange norms has been empirically tested in the context of consumer-brand relationships. Rather than functioning as two mutually exclusive constructs or two opposing ends of a continuum, Johnson and Grimm (2010) found that communal and exchange norms in brand relationships are two distinctive constructs that should be measured separately. In some brand relationships, both dimensions can be positively correlated (i.e., both types of norms coexist in a given relationship); nevertheless, most consumers perceive relationships that are a mix of

communal and exchange norms, each varying in strength, and the relative salience of communal or exchange brand norms could be primed through situational stimulations (Aggarwal, 2004; Aggarwal & Law, 2005).

According to Aggarwal (2004), consumer-brand relationships are inherently exchange-like because transactions of branded products essentially involve comparable cost-benefit reciprocity between consumers and brands. Consumers pay for the products or services with the expectation of getting the equivalent value in return. However, some marketers position their brands with an emphasis on the well-being of consumers rather than on maximizing their own profits. Such brands are likely to highlight communal norms on top of the exchange norms, and, as a result, communal norms are more salient than exchange norms for these brands in the minds of consumers.

Norms serve as relational contracts that outline the expectations of the way relationship partners should behave, and thus relationship norms influence consumers' evaluations of a brand's actions (Aggarwal, 2004, 2009). Evidence shows that consumers evaluate a brand that violates the norms more negatively than a brand that follows the norms (Aggarwal, 2004). Furthermore, as consumers use relationship norms to guide their interactions with brands, the relationship norms affect consumers' information processing strategies by influencing the particular information they attend to (Aggarwal & Law, 2005).

Informed by these findings regarding the impact of relationship norms on brand evaluations, this research extends the current literature by examining the relationship between relationship norms and people's tendency to use two fundamental dimensions of

social cognition – morality and competence – to make inferences about brand actions. There is a remarkable consensus in the literature that we make judgment of people, trait terms, behaviors, groups, or cultures along these two dimensions (Judd, et al., 2005). Communal norms have a focus on concern for others whereas exchange norms focus on the reciprocity of self-interest and benefits. The present research proposes that these two different relational goals associated with the communal and exchange norms determine consumers' tendency to attend to either morality or competence information when they evaluate brands.

In order to set the foundation for the series of empirical studies, the first set of hypotheses directly examines the links between communal norms and morality-based brand evaluation and between exchange norms and competence-based brand evaluation. When communal norms or exchange norms are made salient at the point of brand interaction, consumers' communal or exchange relationship goal would render either morality-related or competence-related brand information more relevant to forming brand attitudes. Consistent with the assumption of different information processing tendencies in different norms, the second set of hypotheses examines the impact of such processing differences in the context of persuasion communication. The second set of hypotheses proposes that, as a result of norm compatibility, consumers in communal relationships are more likely to be persuaded by a brand that is presented as sincere versus competent, whereas consumers in exchange relationships are more likely to be persuaded by a brand that has a competent image versus a sincere image. Furthermore, this research proposes that the information processing differences in communal and exchange norms would

further influence consumers' attitude revision after being exposed to morality- and competence-based negative brand information. Consumers in communal relationships should be more sensitive to morality-based information and thus are more likely to adjust their attitudes downward when they are exposed to negative morality-based brand information. On the other hand, consumers' attitudes in exchange relationships should be more susceptible to the impact of competence-based negative brand information.

Relationship Norms and Morality and Competence Social Judgment

In the past few years, research has established that perceived morality and competence are the two universal dimensions of human social cognition (Fiske, et al., 2006). For instance, this distinction has been linked to person perception and disposition inference (Wojciszke, Brycz, & Borkenau, 1993), social value orientations (Van Lange & Kuhlman, 1994), cultural values (Wojciszke, 1997), group stereotypes (Judd, et al., 2005; Phalet & Poppe, 1997), and formation of social networks (Casciaro & Lobo, 2005). In the impression formation domain, according to the classical study by Rosenberg, Nelson, and Vivekananthan (1968) on trait dimensions, morality and competence constitute two relatively independent meanings of human behavior and personality traits. The two basic dimensions of morality and competence account for 82% of the variance in perception of everyday social behavior (Wojciszke, et al., 1998).

Research on person perception suggests that people tend to see traits as goal-based categories and that many behaviors hang together to represent a trait because these behaviors share the same goal (Mischel, 1973; Read, et al., 1990; Read & Miller, 1989). In general, morality and competence represent two inherently distinctive goals—morality

traits are characterized by an other-profitable, relational goal, whereas competence traits are characterized by a self-profitable, task-orientated goal. 'Moral-social' traits, such as honest, friendly or aggressive (a negative morality trait), involve perceiving intention of right or wrong, and social behavior derived from morality traits tends to affect the well-being of other people around the judged person. 'Self-profitable' traits are related to the efficiency of goal attainment, including competent, intelligent, and efficient, because these traits directly affect the processor's chance of achieving their personal goals (Peeters, 2001; Wojciszke, et al., 1998).

Impression formation and trait inference are highly flexible and dependent on the perceiver's cognitive and motivational goals (Hilton & Darley, 1991). When people have the motivation to process information pertinent to a particular goal, they evaluate others' behaviors more on the goal-compatible traits (Trzebinski, 1985; Wojciszke, et al., 1998). Wojciszke and his colleagues (1998) empirically demonstrated that people were drawn to information about morality traits (i.e., traits of relational goal) of a target person when they were given a morality-relevant goal (e.g., confide a personal secret in the target person). On the other hand, individuals evaluated the target person along the competence dimension (i.e., traits of task-oriented goal) when they were told the target person was to be selected to engage in a complicated negotiation task (i.e., competence-relevant goal) (Wojciszke, et al., 1998). The same effect was also empirically supported in another study by Wojciszke (1997). He showed that people with individualistic value referred mostly to competence traits, whereas people with collectivistic value referred mostly to morality traits. The relative salient accessibility of morality or competence trait

inferences is the result of goal orientations of collectivistic (i.e., communal, relationship-directed) and individualistic (i.e., agentic, achievement-directed) values.

In a similar way, this research proposes that consumers also refer to brands in either morality terms or competence terms. Furthermore, the way morality and competence information is used to make brand-related inferences is influenced by the norms of a given brand relationship. Consumers frequently relate to brands in ways that mirror their relationships with people in the social context (Aggarwal, 2004; Fournier, 1998), and consumers are indeed found to make inferences of a brand's image in accordance to marketing actions undertaken by the brand (Aaker, 1997; Johar, et al., 2005). Although communal and exchange norms have not been empirically linked to the trait inferences of morality or competence, the inherent characteristics of communal and exchange norms do share similarities with goals of morality and competence traits. In an exchange relationship, people follow equity principals (Clark & Mills, 1979; Clark & Reis, 1988). In other words, the prominent goal of an exchange relationship is to pursue equivalent inputs and outputs and to maximize economic productivity (Deutsch, 1975, 1985). In a commercial context, exchange norms translate into a tendency for consumers to use benefit-cost ratios to organize their interactions with brands. Such ratio scales provide consumers with a means to assess different brands' relative merits and to give rise to people's achievement motivation to maximize their own economic benefits (Aggarwal, 2004; Fiske, 1992). In other words, consumers are more likely to develop exchange relationships with brands which they trust to effectively deliver desirable outcomes because they are concerned about their self-interest and the cost-benefit

exchange in such relationships. This task-oriented focus of exchange norms should make competence-related brand traits more accessible when consumers evaluate brand actions.

On the other hand, communal relationships operate on a need basis (Clark & Mills, 1979; Deutsch, 1975, 1985). Members in a communal relationship provide benefits to one another based on concern for others' welfare. In the consumer-brand relationship context, brands that emphasize consumer well-being rather than profit maximization are often regarded as operating within communal norms (Aggarwal, 2004). In such relationships, brands take on a persona that transcends an emphasis on profit and self-interest alone. The need-based, relational-oriented goal of a communal relationship should result in consumers' judging the brand along the morality dimension (i.e., sincerity, mutual care, and concerns).

Some brand relationship literature provides evidence that consumers use relationship norms to guide their interactions with brands, and thus relationship norms influence how information is attended to and processed at the time of exposure to brand-related information (Aggarwal & Law, 2005). However, no consumer studies have empirically looked at how relational norms influence people's tendency to use the two fundamental dimensions of social cognition (morality and competence information) when making inferences about brands. Following the assumption that the goals of relationship norms affect how consumers attend to goal-related brand information, the current research proposes that relationship norms would influence consumers' morality or competence information processing orientations. Communal norms ordinarily involve kindness and provoke a focus on other-interests whereas exchange norms emphasize self-

concerns (Bresnahan, Chiu, & Levine, 2004; Fiske, et al., 2006). Hence, communal or exchange norms salient at the time of brand interactions should influence the relative accessibility of the morality or competence trait dimensions. When exchange norms are salient, consumers would judge the brand that they are interacting with in competence terms; when communal norms are salient, consumers would evaluate brand actions along the morality dimension.

> **H1:** Relationship norms salient at brand interaction will influence the type of brand information consumers attend to in evaluating the brand. More specifically,
>
> **H1a**: When exchange norms are salient, consumers will be more likely to evaluate the brand in competence terms.
>
> **H1b:** When communal norms are salient, consumers will be more likely to evaluate the brand in morality terms.

One of the most robust phenomena in consumer research is that consumers are more likely to show favorable attitudes towards an object when the persuasive messages are congruent with their own cognitive structures (Cacioppo, Petty, & Sidera, 1982; Eagly & Chaiken, 1993; Sirgy, 1982). Relationship norms serve as cognitive structures that people use to construe relationships and regulate their patterns of interpersonal relatedness (Fiske, 1992). Studies have shown that when brand actions are in line with relationship norms, consumers exhibit more positive attitudes and stronger future intentions to continue the brand relationship (Aggarwal, 2004, 2009).

As empirical data suggest, sincerity and competence constitute two important dimensions of brand image (Aaker, 1997). A framework of brand personality developed

by Aaker (1997) highlights five main dimensions of brand personality (sincerity, excitement, competence, sophistication, and ruggedness). Among these five dimensions, sincere and competent brand personality dimensions appear to catch much of the variance in personality ratings of brand (Aaker, 1997). Furthermore, these two dimensions appear to exist both in Western culture, such as in the U.S. (Aaker, 1997; Aaker, et al., 2001), as well as in Eastern culture (Aaker, 1997; Sung & Tinkham, 2005). The sincerity dimension captures brand images such as honest, sincere, friendly, and sentimental; the competence dimension meanwhile includes brand images such as confident, reliable, competent, intelligent, and the like. Thus, sincere brand images closely resemble the morality traits of human personality, and competent brand images are similar to the competence traits of human personality. Therefore, it is proposed in this research that if competence dimension of social judgment is an integral part of exchange norms, consumers should have more favorable attitudes toward a brand with a competent brand image when exchange norms are salient in the brand relationship. Accordingly, if morality social judgment is associated with communal norms, consumers should show favorable attitudes toward a brand with a sincere image when communal norms are dominant.

Hence, to empirically test the assumption that competence and morality dimensions are the dominant cognitive structures for exchange and communal norms, respectively, the following hypotheses are put forth:

H2: Communal and exchange relationship norms will influence the effectiveness of sincere and competent brand images presented in advertising. More specifically,

H2a: When exchange norms are salient, consumers will react more favorably toward the advertisement that portrays the brand to be competent versus sincere.

H2b: When communal norms are salient, consumers will react more favorably toward the advertisement that portrays the brand to be sincere versus competent.

Attitude Revision in the Face of Inconsistent Brand Information

It is a marketer's goal to present brands in a positive light through well-articulated marketing messages. However, in today's marketplace, where consumers have easy access to an abundance of information online, it is very common for consumers to be exposed to different sources of brand information, such as third-party consumer reports or consumer product reviews. These sources could contain negative information that contradicts consumers' initial beliefs about brands. In reality, consumers have to consistently manage a mixture of positive and negative brand information when making their own evaluations about brands. Therefore, it is critical to understand how consumers' evaluations persist or change in the face of inconsistent, negative, counterattitudinal brand information (Johar, et al., 2005; Muthukrishnan & Chattopadhyay, 2007).

Research on negative brand information and word-of-mouth communication suggests that there are two common types of negative information in the market—performance-related and values-related (Marcus & Goodman, 1991; Pullig, et al., 2006). Performance-related negative information involves consumer complaints regarding a brand's ability to provide functional benefits, whereas value-related problems involve incidents where consumers call into question a brand's corporate social responsibility and

business ethics (Pullig, et al., 2006). The distinction between these two types of consumer complaints is in line with the inherent nature of morality and competence dimensions of social cognition. Performance-related issues influence the perception of a company's ability, and such information should be interpreted and evaluated in competence terms. In contrast, value-related complaints concern a brand's moral conduct, which should be evaluated in morality terms. Therefore, understanding how people process morality or competence information in exchange and communal norms has practical implications because it influences both the cognitive basis of forming initial brand judgment and the types of negative brand information people attend to in consequent interactions with brands.

Recent research on attitude revision adopts an accessibility-based framework (Johar, et al., 2005; Pham & Muthukrishnan, 2002). Much of this line of research has drawn a distinction on the basis of affective/cognitive attitude dimensions and the matching or mismatching of affective/cognitive persuasive appeals. Most of the studies have demonstrated a matching effect wherein an attitude undergoes revision when there is a match between the basis of the attitude and the content of the counterattitudinal messages (Edwards & von Hippel, 1995; Fabrigar & Petty, 1999). This theoretical approach suggests that people are likely to reconsider their initial attitudes in light of new disconfirming information when certain conditions are met. Pham and Muthukrishnan (2002) lay out two conditions: First, the target of the new information should be accessible in memory. Second, attitude revision occurs when the new information is alignable (i.e., compatible or commensurable) with the information retrieved from

memory (i.e., the new counterattitudinal information should share a common dimension with prior proattitudinal experiences). This is because commensurability determines the diagnosticity of the incoming new information. For instance, Pham and Muthukrishnan (2002) used the positioning of a brand (i.e., abstract versus attribute specific) to create conditions of compatibility or incompatibility between initial positive brand information and the new negative information (i.e., when compatible, both initial information and new information were abstract rather than one being abstract and the other being attribute specific). Their results showed that the new information was more likely to cause attitude revision when the dimension of its content was alignable with the content of initial information. In contrast, when the content dimensions of the new and the initial information were not compatible, the new negative information resulted in less attitude revision.

In light of the principle of the matching effect, the present research proposes that when consumers encounter morality-based or competence-based negative information, their attitude revision would depend on the types of relationships they have with the brand. It is hypothesized that competence information is more accessible in the exchange norms. According to the alignment principle, people who have exchange relationships with brands should find competence-based negative information more diagnostic. As a result, they are more likely to adjust their brand attitudes downward to reflect this new information. In contrast, for exchange norm-oriented consumers, morality-based negative information should exert less impact on their initial attitudes (i.e., incompatible dimension). Along the same lines, people in communal relationships with a brand should

find morality-based negative information more diagnostic, and consequently, their attitudes toward the communal brand should decrease in response to the negative information. When facing competence-based negative information, their attitudes should be less influenced by such incompatible information. Hence, the following hypotheses are proposed:

> **H3:** Communal and exchange relationship norms will influence consumers' attitudinal and behavioral changes regarding a brand following morality- and competence-based negative information on the brand. More specifically,
>
> **H3a:** For consumers in exchange relationships with a brand, competence-based negative information associated with the brand will result in more negative attitudinal and behavioral changes than will morality-based negative information.
>
> **H3b:** For consumers in communal relationships with a brand, morality-based information associated with the brand will result in more negative attitudinal and behavioral changes than will competence-based negative information.

Chapter 6: Overview of Empirical Research

The proposed hypotheses are examined in three experimental studies. To test the first set of hypotheses (H1a and H1b), Study 1 investigates whether relationship norms activated at the point of brand evaluation influence the type of information consumers attend to when making judgment about a brand.

Next, Study 2 extends Study 1 and applies the relationship norms' impact on information processing to advertising effectiveness. Specifically, Study 2 examines the second set of hypotheses postulating that the relationship norms salient at brand exposure determine consumers' preference for morality-framed or competence-framed advertising messages. A norm-congruent advertising message is expected to elicit more favorable responses toward the advertised brand.

Finally, Study 3 tests the third set of hypotheses (H3a to H3b). The third set of hypotheses explores how the norm dominant in a consumer's relationship with a brand influences the consumer's responses to two types of negative brand information (i.e., morality-based and competence-based), given their different tendencies of using morality or competence information to make brand evaluation.

Although these three experiments are similar in terms of the constructs studied, the methods used for the three studies are different in several ways and are designed to make that research findings generalizable. First, the communal and exchange norms were experimentally induced with a fictitious brand in Studies 1 and 2, whereas they were measured with a real brand in Study 3 to reflect a stable relationship pattern in an established real-life brand relationship and enhance external validity. More specifically,

Study 1 and Study 2 employed priming tasks to elicit individuals' communal and exchange norms in a consumer-brand context. The priming tasks adapted from Aggarwal (2004) involved procedures where participants were directly exposed to brand interaction scenarios characterized by either communal or exchange norms. For Study 3, the communal and exchange relationship scales were adapted from Johnson and Grimm (2010) to measure consumers' existing relationship with a real brand. Past research has suggested that communal and exchange norms can be situationally made salient as well as measured to reflect the relationship orientation of an established brand relationship. However, to date, no studies have employed both methods at the same time to directly compare the differences between primed norms and measured norms in influencing consumer behaviors.

Second, the effect of communal and exchange prime are examined differently in Studies 1 and 2. Study 1 used an indirect priming task. That is, participants were first exposed to a priming task involving Brand X to elicit their communal or exchange relationship orientation towards the brand. Then, in a separate, unrelated brand evaluation task, participants were asked to evaluate a different brand, Brand Y, based on a product description. In contrast, a direct priming effect was examined in Study 2. The same brand was presented in the priming task as well as a subsequent ad evaluation task. The intention of employing two priming designs is to understand whether the activated norms induced by the priming tasks could influence subsequent information processing tasks that are either unrelated or related to the priming task.

Third, product categories used for examining brand relationship norms are different in these three studies to ensure external validity of the research findings. A fictitious wireless service brand was selected for Study 1, and a banking brand was used for Study 2. In Study 3, consumers' real relationships with a coffee brand, Starbucks, were measured. The purpose of including variety of product categories was to increase the generalizability of the research findings.

Furthermore, this research includes samples that were drawn from both the college student population and the general population. The college student samples of Study 1 and Study 2 were used to first establish the relationships between relationship norms and social information processing tendencies proposed by the theoretical framework. To increase the validity of the research findings, Study 3 used a representative sample of the U.S. general population to investigate how different forms of consumer-brand relationships influence the way consumers react to different types of negative brand information.

Chapter 7: Study 1

Validating the Relationships between Relationship Norms and Two Dimensions of Social Cognition

This dissertation proposes that the morality dimension of social information processing is predominant in the context of communal brand relationships whereas the competence dimension of social information processing is prevailing in the context of exchange brand relationships. To the best of my knowledge, little research, if any, has been conducted on linking communal and exchange norms to morality and competence social cognition. As the first step, Study 1 focuses on establishing the foundation of this research by validating the relationship between norms and two dimensions of social cognition. In other words, Study 1 intends to answer the first set of hypotheses proposed in Chapter 5.

> **H1:** Relationship norms salient at brand interaction will influence the type of brand information consumers attend to in evaluating the brand. More specifically,
>
> **H1a**: When exchange norms are salient, consumers will be more likely to evaluate the brand in competence terms.
>
> **H1b:** When communal norms are salient, consumers will be more likely to evaluate the brand in morality terms.

METHOD

This section details the research method and a series of pretests conducted to refine experimental stimuli for Study 1.

Study Design and Participants

Study 1 employed a simple one-way design (relationship norm priming: communal vs. exchange) to test H1a and H1b. Relationship norms were experimentally induced by two priming scenarios that described either a communal brand interaction situation or an exchange brand interaction situation. Participants were recruited from undergraduate-level marketing and advertising classes at the University of Texas at Austin. A total of 49 students participated in the study in exchange for course credit (mean age = 20.6; 59.2% female). In this study, no pre-screening procedure for brand users was required because participants were asked to evaluate a fictitious brand after they had been primed with communal or exchange norms.

Procedures

Participants were randomly assigned to either of the two conditions—communal prime or exchange prime. Participants in the communal or exchange condition read a brief description of their hypothetical interaction with a fictitious brand which was intended to manipulate either communal or exchange relationship norms. After reading the description, participants completed manipulation check questions adapted from Aggarwal (2004) to measure their primed norm orientations.

After completing the manipulation check questions, participants in both conditions were presented with a short description concerning another fictitious brand in a different product domain. The description included information about both competent and moral attributes of the brand. After exposure to this description, participants were

instructed to evaluate the second fictitious brand that they just read about and complete dependent measures. The reasons for using two different fictitious brands for the priming and brand evaluation tasks were two-fold: 1) to prevent suspicion of the true intention of the study, and 2) to avoid a confounding effect if the same brand used in the priming tasks (i.e., brand interaction scenarios) was also used in the description. This design allowed a better understanding of how heightened norms caused by the priming task could further influence participants' consequential evaluation of a different brand in a separate task.

The product description was created such that it contained comparable moral and competent brand attributes about the second fictitious brand. The study hypothesized that participants in the communal condition would be more likely to evaluate the brand based on the moral information described, and participants in the exchange condition would be more likely to evaluate the brand based on competent information in the product description.

Stimulus Development

A series of pre-tests were conducted to ensure the appropriateness and quality of stimuli. Details of each pretest and the final set of stimuli are described below.

Pretest 1: Brand Selection

First, a pretest was performed to select a list of products that are appropriate and relevant to college students because samples for Studies 1 and 2 were drawn from the college student population. The selection of product domains was governed by two

criteria: 1) the product is familiar to college students, and 2) the product is important to their daily functions.

To this purpose, a questionnaire was developed and distributed to a sample of 25 college students. Each respondent was asked to rate a list of product domains (e.g., coffee, banking, fast food, wireless service, etc.) based on their familiarity and importance. Familiarity and importance were measured on two seven-point, semantic differential scales, anchored by familiar-unfamiliar and important-unimportant, respectively. Below are the top ranked product categories on both scales.

Table 7.1: Top Ranked Product Categories

	Familiarity	**Importance**
Wireless service	6.44	6.60
Internet service	5.96	6.04
Consumer electronics	5.98	5.96
Banking	5.68	5.08
Sports	4.52	5.04

To diversify the selection of product categories, products ranked by the college students as the most and moderately familiar and important were selected for Studies 1 and 2. Based on the results, Internet (high ranking), wireless service (high ranking), and banking (moderate ranking) were considered to be three suitable product domains for the studies. Therefore, a fictitious wireless brand and a fictitious Internet service brand were created for Study 1, and a fictitious banking brand was used for Study 2.

Pretest 2: Scenario Development

Prior work indicates that even in the absence of an actual long-term relationship, the effect of a relationship can still be observed by priming the relationship norms in a laboratory setting (Aggarwal, 2004; Clark & Mills, 1993). Following this logic, stimuli for relationship norm priming are essential to this study, and scenarios of consumer-brand interaction were adopted from previous research for priming procedures (Aggarwal, 2004). Brand interaction scenarios were first created based on Aggarwal's study (2004), and modifications were made to reflect the characteristics relevant to the selected wireless service brand (*Brand X*) for the current study.

The exchange relationship scenario reflected a quid pro quo consumer-brand interaction. In the scenario, the brand was described as providing professional and efficient services, yet consumers had to pay the price to receive such quality service. For instance, the exchange brand relationship scenario reads, "They have the most reliable wireless network and the best coverage in the nation. In fact, compared to other wireless service providers that you have used, Brand X provides the best call quality and rarely drops your calls… Although Brand X charges higher prices for its plans, they do offer better service than their competitors. In fact, you always feel you get what you pay for with Brand X. Higher prices come with better services. Their technical support is also the best in the market. In the past, whenever you have had problems with your phone, you have always gotten your issues resolved very quickly in the store or online. Their employees seem to be quite well-trained, formal, and professional— they respect your time and get the job done fast. Although you had to pay to get your issues resolved, you

have been happy that you always get your money's worth when doing business with Brand X."

In the communal relationship scenario, the brand was described as attentive to consumer needs rather than emphasizing business profits and self-interest alone. The scenario reads, "Brand X has always treated you well and accommodated your needs. You feel that Brand X puts customer satisfaction ahead of everything else. For instance, over the past few years, whenever you had problems with your phone, the customer service representatives on the phone or in the store were always friendly and helpful. They seem to take a personal interest in you because they listen to your problems carefully. Most importantly, your issues have been resolved without costing you anything extra. As a student on a tight budget, you really appreciate the help that their service agents have offered, and the friendly service of Brand X has made you feel that they will be there for you whenever you are in need…. Unlike other companies whose goal is to pursue profit maximization, you feel Brand X really devotes its resources to ensuring consumer well-being." See Appendix A for details for the two scenarios.

These two scenarios were pretested with a sample of 46 students (23 students per cell). Participants were randomly assigned to read either exchange or communal brand interaction scenario and then completed manipulation check questions (for details, see Manipulation Check). The pretest results were in the predicted directions. Communal participants provided a higher Net Communality Score than exchange participants ($M_{Comm.} = 5.32$, $SD_{Comm.} = .69$; $M_{Exch.} = 4.75$, $SD_{Exch.} = 1.33$; $t(44) = 1.81$, $p = .08$, $d = .54$). In contrast, exchange participants provided a higher Net Exchange Score than communal

participants ($M_{Exch.}$ = 5.76, $SD_{Exch.}$ = .63; $M_{Comm.}$= 5.43, $SD_{Comm.}$ = .72; $t(44) = 1.66$, $p = .10$, d= .49).

Pretest 3: Product Description Development

Another pretest was conducted to construct the product description for the second fictitious brand. A fictitious broadband Internet Service Provider (ISP) brand (*Brand Y*) was selected to create the product description for two reasons. First, according to the results of Pretest 1, Internet service was considered to be a service category that is important and familiar to the college sample. Additionally, an ISP brand is functionally different from the wireless brand used for norm priming task in terms of the type of services delivered. Hence, using an ISP brand for product description could potentially avoid any confounding effect on brand evaluation caused by the norm priming task.

A list of six morality-related and competence-related brand attributes was generated for the brand. Together, these twelve attributes were rated by a sample of 20 students on the importance of each attribute to their purchase decision on a seven-point scale (1= important; 7=unimportant). To ensure that the moral and competent brand attributes described in the product description were comparable, the same number of attributes that had been rated equally high on both dimensions was selected to be included in the product description.

Based on the pretest results, three comparable brand attributes were chosen from each dimension to construct the product description (see details below). The top three attributes rated as important were selected from each dimension. Three competence-related attributes included reliable service (M = 6.47), efficient service repair/support (M

= 6.21), and being the leader in the industry (*M* = 5.36). Three morality-related attributes included honest contractual disclosures (*M* = 6.21), protection of customer privacy (*M* = 6.05), and a community outreach program (*M* = 5.26). See below for the details of the product description.

Product Description.

"Brand Y" is a DSL provider for home Internet service. Recently, they have decided to launch a new campaign to strengthen their brand image. According to their marketing plan, they will use the list of brand information below to position their brand in the campaign. These reasons set Brand Y apart from other DSL Internet service providers:

- *Backed by our years of experience, Brand Y provides the most reliable DSL Internet service in the nation.* We make sure our customers stay connected – all the time, anytime.
- *Brand Y is committed to protecting consumer rights and privacy.* We do not collect and store unnecessary user data. We strictly forbid selling our user data to any third party services unless approval is given by our customers.
- *Brand Y is the leading innovator in the market.* With the most advanced labs in the industry, the technology we have developed set the standard for our competitors to follow.
- *Brand Y has a clear conscience and good business ethics* when doing business with our customers. We always disclose material and service charges clearly so customers won't be surprised by any hidden fees.

- Brand Y knows how frustrating it can be for our customers if something goes wrong with their Internet access, so we're always here to help. *Users have voted us the most efficient and professional repair service across all other Internet service providers.*
- *We care about our local communities.* Brand Y believes everyone should have access to the Internet in today's world. Our community support program provides discounted plans to make Internet more affordable for low-income families and qualified customers.

Manipulation Check

Net Communality and Exchange Scores. The manipulation check questions consisted of 10 items adapted from Aggarwal (2004). The scale measured an individual's communal or exchange orientation. Seven items tapped into communal norms and the remaining three related to exchange norms. Communal and exchange norm items were averaged to create Net Communal and Exchange Scores, respectively.

Brand Personification. To further assess if the relationship manipulation was actually effective, a set of brand personification questions were also used. The participants were asked to imagine the brand coming alive and becoming a person. They then rated the extent to which the brand was like a close friend, a family member, a business-person, and a merchant. The first two were considered to be communal relationships, and the latter two were exchange relationships.

Dependent Measures

Brand attitude. Adopted from Aggarwal (2004), brand attitude was assessed with three items (dislike-like, dissatisfied-satisfied, unfavorable-favorable) on a seven-point scale. This measure was designed to capture each participant's overall evaluation of the fictitious ISP (Internet Service Provider) brand (i.e., *Brand Y*) featured in the product description.

Evaluation of Morality and Competence Brand Attributes. After participants read the product description of the fictitious ISP brand, they were instructed to rate how important each brand attribute mentioned in the description had been on their evaluation of the brand on a seven-point scale (unimportant-important). This dependent measure was designed to capture how the primed communal and exchange norms influenced the way that morality-related and competence-related brand attributes were processed and weighted.

RESULTS

Manipulation Check

Net Communality and Exchange Scores

Communal and exchange norm items were averaged to create communal and exchange norm index scores (i.e., Net Communality Score and Net Exchange Score). The results of the manipulation check showed that the relationship norms indeed were primed by the relationship manipulation. Participants in the communal condition provided a higher Net Communality Score than participants in the exchange condition did ($M_{\text{Comm.}}$=

5.44, $SD_{Comm.}$ = .80; $M_{Exch.}$ = 4.88, $SD_{Exch.}$ = .94; $t(47) = 2.25$, $p < .05$, $d = .64$). On the other hand, participants in the exchange condition provided a higher Net Exchange Score than participants in the communal condition did ($M_{Exch.}$ = 5.79, $SD_{Exch.}$ = .54; $M_{Comm.}$ = 5.46, $SD_{Comm.}$ = .47; $t(47) = 2.25$, $p < .05$, $d = .65$).

Table 7.2: Independent-Sample t-test for Communality and Exchange Scores

	Communal Prime (N=24)		**Exchange Prime (N=25)**		***t*-value**	***p-value***
	M	*SD*	*M*	*SD*		
Communal score	5.44	.80	4.88	.94	2.25	.03
Exchange score	5.46	.47	5.79	.54	2.25	.03

Brand Personification

As predicted, participants primed for the communal norms were more likely than participants primed for the exchange norms to see the brand as a friend ($M_{Comm.}$ = 5.67, $SD_{Comm.}$ = 1.05; $M_{Exch.}$ = 4.12, $SD_{Exch.}$ = 1.45; $t(47) = 4.26$, $p < .001$, $d = 1.22$) or family member ($M_{Comm.}$ = 4.46., $SD_{Comm.}$ = 1.67; $M_{Exch.}$ = 3.52, $SD_{Exch.}$ = 1.63; $t(47) = 1.99$, $p = .05$, $d = 0.57$). In contrast, exchange norm-oriented participants were more likely than communal norm-oriented participants to see the brand as a business person ($M_{Exch.}$ = 6.60, $SD_{Exch.}$ = .58; $M_{Comm.}$ = 5.21, $SD_{Comm.}$ = 1.41; $t(47) = 4.55$, $p < .001$, $d = 1.29$) or a merchant ($M_{Exch.}$ = 5.84, $SD_{Exch.}$ = .99; $M_{Comm.}$ = 5.12, $SD_{Comm.}$ = 1.15; $t(47) = 2.34$, $p < .05$, $d = .67$).

Table 7.3: Independent-Sample t-test for Brand Personification

	Communal Prime (N=24)		**Exchange Prime (N=25)**		***t*-value**	***p-value***
	M	*SD*	*M*	*SD*		
Friend	5.67	1.05	4.12	1.45	4.26	.00
Family	4.46	1.67	3.52	1.63	1.99	.05
Business person	5.21	1.41	6.60	.58	4.55	.00
Merchant	5.12	1.15	5.84	.99	2.34	.02

Hypothesis Testing

Evaluation of Morality and Competence Brand Attributes

H1a and H1b predicted that exchange norm-oriented participants would rely on competence brand attributes more, whereas communal norm-oriented participants would rely on morality brand attributes more when evaluating the brand featured in the product description. The results showed that communal norm-oriented participants were more likely than exchange norm-oriented participants to consider morality-related attributes important when evaluating the brand. Communal norm-oriented participants placed greater importance on a brand's privacy protection policy ($M_{Comm.}$= 6.33, $SD_{Comm.}$ = .76; $M_{Exch.}$ = 5.72, $SD_{Exch.}$= 1.28; $t(47) = 2.03$, $p < .05$, $d = 0.58$), honest contractual disclosure ($M_{Comm.}$= 6.42, $SD_{Comm.}$ = .58; $M_{Exch.}$ = 5.68, $SD_{Exch.}$= 1.60; $t(47) = 2.12$, $p < .05$, $d = 0.61$), and community outreach program ($M_{Comm.}$= 5.46, $SD_{Comm.}$ = 1.29; $M_{Exch.}$ = 4.64, $SD_{Exch.}$= 1.38; $t(47) = 2.15$, $p < .05$, $d = 0.61$). By contrast, participants in both exchange and communal conditions did not differ in their emphasis on competence-related brand attributes such as reliable service ($M_{Exch.}$ = 6.24, $SD_{Exch.}$= 1.05; $M_{Comm.}$= 6.38, $SD_{Comm.}$ = .77; $t(47) = .51$, $p = .61$), being an industry leader ($M_{Exch.}$ = 6.20, $SD_{Exch.}$= 1.00; *M*

$_{Comm.}$= 6.42, $SD_{Comm.}$ = .93; $t(47) = .79$, $p = .44$), and efficient service repair/support ($M_{Exch.}$ = 5.56, $SD_{Exch.}$= 1.08; $M_{Comm.}$= 5.58, $SD_{Comm.}$ = 1.14; $t(47) = .07$, $p = .94$) when making their brand evaluations. Hence, only H1b was supported.

Brand Attitude

Participants' responses to the three items measuring brand evaluation were averaged to form an index score ($\alpha = .86$). There was no significant difference between the two conditions in terms of how participants evaluated the brand featured in the product description ($M_{Comm.}$= 5.89, $SD_{Comm.}$ = .95; $M_{Exch.}$ = 6.09, $SD_{Exch.}$= .75; $t(47) = .84$, $p = .41$).

Table 7.4: Independent-Sample t-test for Moral and Competent Brand Attributes

	Communal Prime (N=24)		Exchange Prime (N=25)		*t*-value	*p-value*
	M	*SD*	*M*	*SD*		
Moral attributes						
Privacy protection	6.33	.76	5.72	1.28	2.03	.04
Honest disclosure	6.42	.58	5.68	1.60	2.12	.04
Community outreach	5.46	1.29	4.64	1.38	2.15	.04
Competent attributes						
Reliable service	6.38	.77	6.24	1.05	.51	.61
Industry leader	6.42	.93	6.20	1.00	.79	.44
Efficient repair/support	5.58	1.14	5.56	1.08	.07	.94

DISCUSSION

Study 1 was designed to assess if the salience of communal or exchange brand relationship norms influences the types of brand attributes consumers attend to when making judgments about a brand. Specifically, the study predicted that the likelihood that

exchange norm-oriented consumers would evaluate brands in competence terms is greater than that of communal norm-oriented consumers, whereas the likelihood that communal norm-oriented consumers would evaluate brands in morality terms is greater than that of exchange norm-oriented consumers. The results found partial support for this prediction and indicated that, compared to exchange norm-oriented participants, communal norm-oriented participants placed greater emphasis on morality-related brand attributes, such as a brand's business ethics and corporate citizenship, when evaluating the brand. However, such asymmetry in processing brand information between communal norm-oriented and exchange norm-oriented consumers did not exist for competence-related brand information. The results suggested that both exchange norm-oriented and communal norm-oriented participants equally valued the importance of competence-related attributes.

One possible explanation for the non-significant difference in processing competence-related brand information between conditions is that there is something unique about the commercial context. Unlike the interpersonal context where the independence of communal and exchange norms in a given relationship is possible, consumer-brand relationships are inherently exchange-like (Aggarwal, 2004). For a brand to attract consumers, the brand needs to possess a certain amount of competency in producing quality goods and services. Therefore, consumers in communal relationships with a brand consider information indicating a brand's competency to be important just as their exchange counterparts do.

Despite how exchange norm-oriented and communal norm-oriented participants used moral or competent brand information to shape their judgments about the brand, the results found that there was no significant difference in their general evaluations of the brand. Together, these findings suggested that, although consumers may form similar attitudes toward a brand, the processing of morality or competence brand information underlying their attitude formation differs depending on the types of brand relationships that consumers have with the brand. Consumers in exchange relationships with a brand judge the brand primarily by its competency in delivering quality services and products. Consumers in communal relationships with a brand go beyond the default assessment of competence information by taking into account of the brand's moral conduct when forming their attitudes towards the brand.

Prior work indicates that even in the absence of actual long-term relationships, the effects of relationships may nevertheless be observed in the laboratory setting when a priming task is implemented (Aggarwal, 2004; Aggarwal & Law, 2005; Clark & Mills, 1993). Study 1 provided further evidence of the priming effect on triggering relationship norms. In addition, this study empirically demonstrated that such priming effect could transfer to how people process brand information in a consequent, unrelated brand evaluation task.

Chapter 8: Study 2

The Moderating Role of Brand Relationship Norms in Advertising Message Framing

Study 1 has provided empirical evidence showing the association between relationship norms and the types of social cognition activated in relationships. While competent attributes of a brand are the default merits considered by consumers in the business setting, consumers in communal relationships with a brand are more likely to place additional focus on the ethical value of the brand than exchange norm-oriented consumers would.

To extend the practical implication of the findings, Study 2 investigates how communal and exchange norms and their associated social information processing tendencies influence the effectiveness of different advertising message frames. Recent research suggests that how the brand image is framed in an advertising message results in different persuasive impact on consumers. When an advertising frame is congruent with a consumer's existing knowledge structures, such as self-schema or relationship schema, the consumer has a more favorable evaluation of the ad (e.g., Aaker, 1999; Aaker & Lee, 2001; Lee & Aaker, 2004). In other words, the consistency between an advertising message and a consumer's information processing tendency determines advertising effectiveness. Thus, Study 2 predicts that when the message frame of an advertisement is consistent with the social cognition associated with a given relationship, consumers in

that relationship would react more favorably to the advertisement. Study 2 examines the second set of hypotheses proposed in Chapter 5.

> **H2:** Communal and exchange relationship norms will influence the effectiveness of sincere and competent brand images presented in advertising. More specifically,
>
> **H2a:** When exchange norms are salient, consumers will react more favorably toward the advertisement that portrays the brand to be competent versus sincere.
>
> **H2b:** When communal norms are salient, consumers will react more favorably toward the advertisement that portrays the brand to be sincere versus competent.

METHOD

This section discusses the study instruments used for Study 2 in details.

Study Design

To test the second set of hypotheses, Study 2 employed a 2 (relationship norm priming: communal vs. exchange) × 2 (message frame: sincere image vs. competent image) between-subject design. Both factors, relationship norm and message frame, were experimentally induced. Communal or exchange relationship norms were primed using a brand interaction scenario reflecting either communal or exchange relationship norms. The advertising message was manipulated using texts that emphasized a sincere or a competent brand image. In addition, another product category, banking, was employed in this study for stimuli to increase the generalizability of the research findings.

Stimulus Development

Details of the development of brand interaction scenarios and advertising messages are described below.

Brand Interaction Scenario Development

The brand interaction scenarios used for Study 2 were adapted from those for Study 1 and Aggarwal (2004) to fit the descriptions of the fictitious banking brand named *Synthesis*. Participants in the study were presented with either the communal or the exchange description to trigger their communal or exchange relationship norms.

As in Study 1, the exchange relationship scenario reflected a quid pro quo consumer-brand interaction. In the scenario, the brand was described as providing professional and efficient services, yet consumers had to pay the price to receive such quality service. For instance, the scenario reads, "You have used the bank quite extensively and have been very happy with the efficiency of their services…Although Synthesis charges higher prices for their services than other banks of their size, they do offer better banking products than their competitors. In fact, you always feel you get what you pay for with Synthesis. You pay higher annual fees for your credit cards, but the cards offer better reward programs than other credit cards."

In the communal relationship scenario, the brand was described as attentive to consumer needs rather than emphasizing business profits and self-interest alone. The scenario reads, "The bank has always treated you well and accommodated your needs. As a student with limited resources, you really appreciate that they offered to waive their

account maintenance and services fees. Over the past few years, whenever you have visited the bank, you have had a very pleasant and warm interaction with their personnel. Their executives seem to take a personal interest in you. They listen to your financial needs carefully and often take the initiative in suggesting ways to better manage your funds. They also periodically hold free educational workshops and seminars to help students to plan their financial futures. Overall, the friendly service of Synthesis has made you feel that they will be there for you whenever you are in need." See Appendix B for details for the two scenarios.

Advertisement Development

Two full-color advertisements for the banking brand were created. Following steps described by past research (e.g., Aaker et al., 2004; Swaminathan et al., 2009), competent and sincere brand images were manipulated in terms of slogans, body copy, and pictures for the ads. In the sincere brand image ad, the slogan read, "We turn your dreams into reality. On your road to success, you have Synthesis on your side." The body copy read, "Your own home. Your dream car. Your perfect wedding. In today's economy, there's no substitute for finding a devoted banker who not only shares your belief in your dreams but also has the passion to make them come true….We try an honest and personal approach: you deserve a tailored plan with no hidden agenda that meets your financial needs. It's our priority to get you where you want to be. What matters to you matters to Synthesis too." The picture used for sincere ads featured a happy family with their dreams.

In contrast, the slogan of competent advertisement read, "We turn your concern into confidence. Concrete solutions for your financial future," followed by the body copy: "Paying off your loans. A profitable investment portfolio. A sensible retirement plan. In today's economy, there's no substitute for working with a capable banker who has the experience to lead you toward your brightest possible financial future….With our effective approach to financial planning, you can be confident that you'll have the right mix of products in your hands. You'll have the power to get more from your money – the power of Synthesis." A professional-looking businessperson was featured in the picture.

To ensure that both versions were perceived to be equally favorable to avoid any confounding effect of ad likeability on dependent variables, these two advertisements were pretested with a small set of college students (N=23). In the pretest, participants were presented with either version of the ad and then asked to indicate their attitudes toward the ad on a five-item, seven-point scale (Wheeler, Petty, & Bizer, 2005). The results revealed that the sincere ad was evaluated more favorably than the competent ad, and the difference was marginally significant ($M_{\text{sincere}} = 5.41$, $M_{\text{competent}} = 4.53$; $t(21) = 1.74$, $p = .09$). Additionally, participants' responses to the ad were collected using a thought listing question and helped provide the reasons for the likability difference. The participants' comments indicated that the family picture used for the sincere ad was preferred because it was "interesting and creative," whereas the professional businessperson featured in the competent ad was not well received because the image was somewhat "boring and unattractive." When asked how they would improve the ads, a

number of participants suggested that using a picture showing how the bankers interact with consumers would be a good adjustment.

To reflect the feedback, the same picture, featuring two consumers interacting with a banker, was used for both ads to control for the impact of using different pictures on ad favorability, while the slogans and body copy remained unchanged. A second pretest was then conducted for the revised set of ads (N=30). The results showed that these two advertisements were comparable on the same ad attitude scale ($M_{\text{sincere}} = 4.85$, $M_{\text{competent}} = 4.43$; $t(28) = .91$, $p = .37$). See Appendix B for the two advertisements as final stimuli.

Study Procedure

A total of 108 college students in marketing and communication classes at the University of Texas at Austin participated in this study online in exchange for course credit (mean age = 21; 65.7% female). Participants were told that the purpose of the study was to learn about consumer reaction to a banking brand and to the advertisement that would be used for its new campaign. A fictitious brand (*Synthesis Bank*) was used to minimize any potential confounding effects of the participants' prior brand exposure and knowledge. Upon agreeing to take part, participants were led to a study site where they were randomly assigned to one of the two priming conditions. Depending on the priming condition, participants were first asked to carefully read either a communal or an exchange scenario that described their hypothetical interaction with the bank. Next, participants responded to the manipulation check questions measuring their norm activation after having read the brand interaction scenarios (Aggarwal, 2004).

After the priming procedure, participants were then randomly assigned to see either of the two advertisements created for the bank for the message frame manipulation (Version A: sincere brand image and Version B: competent brand image). After they finished reading the advertisement, participants responded to a series of questions regarding their evaluations of the ad and the brand, the message-framing manipulation, and their demographic characteristics. Finally, participants were thanked and debriefed.

Manipulation Check

Net Communality and Exchange Scores. The manipulation check questions consisted of ten items adapted from Aggarwal (2004). The scale measured participants' communal or exchange orientations resulting from their exposure to the brand interaction scenarios. Seven items tapped into the communal norms ($\alpha = .91$) and the remaining three related to the exchange norms ($\alpha = .84$). Communal and exchange norm items were averaged to create Net Communal and Exchange Scores, respectively.

Perception of Brand Image. Four items adapted from Aaker (1997) measured participants' perceptions of brand image on a seven-point scale. Participants rated the extent to which the brand could be described as sincere (honest, friendly) or competent (intelligent, efficient) according to the ad that they saw. Two index scores were formed by averaging two sincerity items and two competence items, respectively.

Dependent Measures

Ad attitude. Ad attitude was measured with five items (dislike-like, unfavorable-favorable, harmful-beneficial, negative-positive, unconvincing-convincing) on a seven-

point scale adapted from Wheeler et al. (2005) (α = .93). A single index was formed by averaging the items.

Brand attitude. Adopted from Aggrawal (2004), brand attitude was assessed with three items (dislike-like, dissatisfied-satisfied, unfavorable-favorable) on a seven-point scale (α = .96). The scale was designed to capture participants' overall evaluation of the fictitious banking brand. The items were averaged to create an index score.

RESULTS

Manipulation Check

Net Communality and Exchange Scores

The ANOVA results of the manipulation check showed that the intended relationship norms were indeed primed by the relationship manipulation. That is, participants in the communal norm priming condition produced a significantly higher Net Communality Score than those in the exchange norm priming condition did ($M_{Comm.}$= 5.37, $SD_{Comm.}$ = 1.01; $M_{Exch.}$ = 4.72, $SD_{Exch.}$ = .91; $F(1, 106) = 12.44$, $p < .05$, $\eta_p^2 = .11$). On the other hand, participants exposed to the scenario of exchange relationship norms yielded a significantly higher Net Exchange Score than those who read the communal norm scenario did ($M_{Exch.}$ = 5.35, $SD_{Exch.}$= .83; $M_{Comm.}$= 4.99, $SD_{Comm.}$ = .83; $F(1, 106) = 5.16$, $p < .05$, $\eta_p^2 = .05$).

Perception of Brand Image.

As intended, the brand in the competence-framed ad condition was perceived to be significantly more competent than was the brand in the sincerity-framed ad condition

($M_{Competent}$ = 5.56, $SD_{Competent}$ = 1.06; $M_{Sincere}$= 5.11, $SD_{Sincere}$ = .94; $F(1, 106) = 5.38$, $p < .05$, $\eta_p^2 = .05$), and the brand in the sincerity-framed ad was perceived to be significantly more sincere than was the brand in the competence-framed ad ($M_{Sincere}$= 5.18, $SD_{Sincere}$ = 1.16; $M_{Competent}$ = 4.79, $SD_{Competent}$ = .88; $F(1, 106) = 3.86$, $p = .05$, $\eta_p^2 = .04$).

Hypothesis Testing

Two-way ANOVAs examined the hypotheses for two dependent variables: attitude toward the ad and attitude toward the brand. Results revealed marginally significant main effect for relationship norm ($M_{Comm.}$= 4.68, $M_{Exch.}$ = 5.03; $F(1, 104) = 2.86$, $p = .09$) and no significant main effect for message frame ($M_{Sincere}$= 4.91, $M_{Competent}$ = 4.81; $F(1, 104) = .52$, $p = .47$) on attitude toward the ad. Furthermore, as predicted, there was a significant relationship norm × message frame interaction ($F(1, 104) = 12.35$, $p < .05$, $\eta_p^2 = .11$). To further examine the interaction effect, orthogonal planned contrasts were conducted. For communal norm-oriented participants, the sincerity-framed message induced higher positive attitudes toward the ad (M = 5.09) than the competence-framed message did (M = 4.18; $F(1,104) = 8.84$, $p < .01$). On the other hand, exchange norm-oriented participants showed more favorable attitudes toward the competence-framed advertising message (M = 5.30) than toward the sincerity-framed advertisement (M = 4.70; $F(1,104) = 3.95$, $p < .05$).

Results of another two-way ANOVA on attitudes toward the brand also revealed no significant main effects for either relationship norm ($M_{Comm.}$= 5.12, $M_{Exch.}$ = 5.35; F(1,

104) = 1.03, p = .31) or message frame ($M_{Sincere}$= 5.20, $M_{Competent}$ = 5.29; F(1, 104) = .08, p = .78). However, consistent with the prediction, the relationship norm × message frame interaction was significant (F(1, 104) = 7.15, $p < .01$, η_p^2 = .06). Orthogonal planned contrasts examined the interaction effect more closely. Communal norm-oriented participants demonstrated higher positive attitudes toward the brand when they were exposed to the sincerity-framed message (M = 5.36) than when they were exposed to the competence-framed message (M = 4.84). The means were in the expected direction, but the difference was not statistically significant (F(1,104) = 2.84, p = .10). In contrast, exchange norm-oriented participants showed more favorable brand attitudes when the brand was framed as a competent one in the advertising message (M = 5.63) compared to when it was depicted as a sincere one (M = 5.00; F(1,104) = 4.42, $p < .05$). Taken together, H2a and H2b were supported by the study.

Table 8.1: Dependent Measures as a Function of Relationship Norm Prime and Message Frame

	Communal prime		Exchange prime	
	Sincere ad	Competent ad	Sincere ad	Competent ad
Ad attitudes* (α = .93)	5.09	4.18	4.70	5.30
Brand attitudes* (α = .96)	5.36	4.84	5.00	5.63
N	29	24	24	31

Note: Mean scores are based on 7-point scale. *Interaction effect is significant at $p < .05$ level.

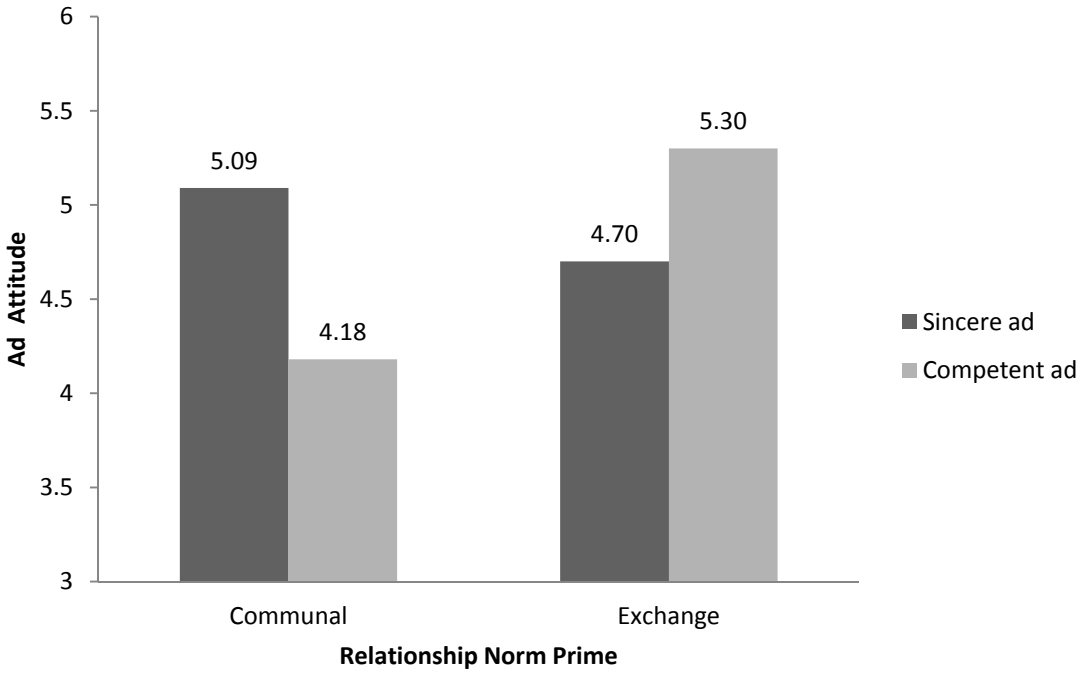

Figure 8.1: Ad Attitude as a Function of Relationship Norm and Message Frame

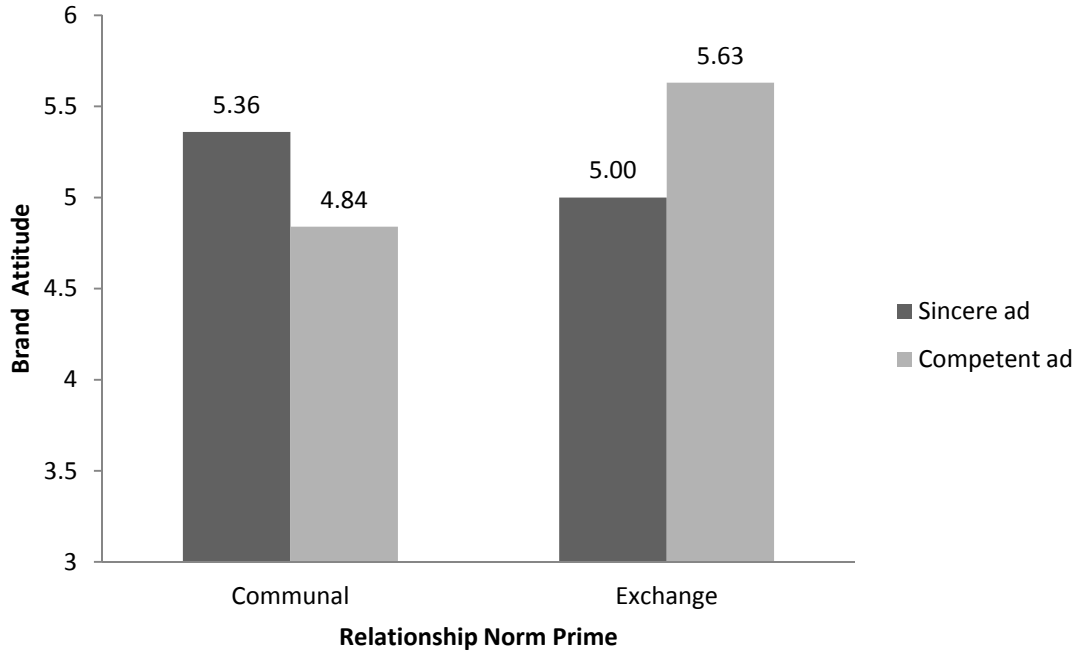

Figure 8.2: Brand Attitude as a Function of Relationship Norm and Message Frame

DISCUSSION

In line with expectations, the results of Study 2 demonstrated that relationship norms play an important role in determining the effectiveness of sincerity-framed versus competence-framed messages within the context of brand advertising. Specifically, communal norm-oriented consumers were more attracted to the brand when it was portrayed to be sincere than when it was portrayed to be competent in the ad, whereas exchange norm-oriented consumers were more attracted to the brand when it was positioned to be competent than when it was positioned to be sincere. Such asymmetrical preferences were reflected in individuals' more favorite attitudes towards the brand and toward the ad when the brand was described in a message frame that was consistent with the dominant social information processing tendency in a given brand relationship.

The findings of Study 2 provided additional evidence of the communal-morality and the exchange-competence associations of social information processing. When communal norms are dominant in a brand relationship, consumers tend to evaluate the brand in morality terms. As congruence effect predicts, communal norm-oriented consumers consider sincerity-framed advertising message to be more persuasive. Similarly, consumers are more likely to evaluate a brand in competence terms and react more favorably to competence-framed messages when they are in exchange relationships with the brand.

Furthermore, Study 2 extended the practical implications of Study 1 by examining the effect of the interplay between brand relationship norms and message frames on

advertising effectiveness and by providing another validation of the effect of norm priming task in a different product category.

Chapter 9: Study 3

The Role of Communal and Exchange Brand Relationships in the Susceptibility to Morality- and Competence-based Negative Brand Information

The results of Study 1 and Study 2 together suggest that competence social cognition plays a prominent role in brand information processing within the context of exchange relationships whereas morality social cognition is influential in brand judgment within the context of communal relationships.

Building on the findings of two earlier studies, the goals of Study 3 are twofold. First, Study 3 investigates how the associations between relationship norms and types of social cognition impact the way people react to morality- and competence-based negative brand information, since these two types of negative brand information are common in today's marketplace and are associated with the social information processing strategies underlying communal and exchange brand relationships. Second, to further examine and substantiate the influence of communal and exchange relationships in a real world setting, the effect of relationship norms that consumers hold with regard to a real brand, rather than those experimentally induced in Studies 1 and 2, are assessed.

Following the matching effect assumption of attitude change (Pham & Muthukrishnan, 2002), Study 3 predicts that consumers in communal relationships with a brand are more susceptible to morality-based negative brand information than to competence-based negative information because their relationships with the brand are built on a moral trust. Thus, their attitudes towards the brand and their behavioral

intentions are more likely to change after viewing morality-based negative brand information. In contrast, consumers in exchange relationships with a brand are more likely to be influenced by competence-based negative brand information than by morality-based negative brand information because the brand is judged by the consumers mainly in competence terms. Study 3 examines the third set of hypotheses.

> **H3:** Communal and exchange relationship norms will influence consumers' attitudinal and behavioral changes regarding a brand following morality- and competence-based negative information on the brand. More specifically,
>
> **H3a:** For consumers in exchange relationships with a brand, competence-based negative information associated with the brand will result in more negative attitudinal and behavioral changes than will morality-based negative information.
>
> **H3b:** For consumers in communal relationships with a brand, morality-based information associated with the brand will result in more negative attitudinal and behavioral changes than will competence-based negative information.

METHOD

Study Design

To test the hypotheses, Study 3 employed a 2 (brand relationship type: communal vs. exchange) × 2 (negative information type: morality-based vs. competence-based) between-subjects, pretest-posttest design. Communal and exchange relationships were measured using communal and exchange relationship scales adapted from Johnson and Grimm (2010) and then dichotomized using median splits for binary classification. The second factor, negative brand information, was manipulated on two levels, morality-based and competence-based information, in the form of consumer complaints. The dependent variables, brand attitude and behavioral intention, were measured twice—

before and after the exposure of negative brand information (i.e., pretest and posttest, respectively). The variables of participants' attitudinal and behavioral change were created by subtracting the posttest scores from the pretest scores. Since past research has suggested that brand commitment is a potential moderator to attitude change (Ahluwalia, 2000; Ahluwalia, Burnkrant, & Unnava, 2000), brand commitment was therefore included as a covariate to control for its effect. Brand commitment was measured using the scale adapted from Aaker et al. (2004).

A real brand, Starbucks, was used for this study. Coffee constitutes an important part of American culture, and Starbucks is the largest coffee house company, also ranking as one of the top 10 brands on social media (Chauveau, 2011). Hence, the coffee brand was chosen due to its popularity and familiarity in the U.S. market.

Stimuli

Morality- and competence-based negative brand information was created in the form of consumer complaints because consumer complaints are one of the most common types of negative brand information that consumers come across in today's market. With the explosive growth of social media, a typical consumer has a good number of opportunities to be exposed to negative word-of-mouth communications, such as negative product reviews, blog posts, or comments supplied by other fellow consumers.

Therefore, two consumer complaints corresponding to morality-based and competence-based negative information about Starbucks were constructed for this study. In process of constructing these two consumer complaints, the key words related to incompetence attributes, such as "low quality" and "unsuccessful business," and the key

words related to immorality attributes, such as "unethical" and "immoral," were entered into search engines to look for common morality- and competence-based complaints about Starbucks and other coffee brands in general. Based on the common themes identified, two fictitious consumer complaints were created for Starbucks.

In the incompetence condition, a consumer complaint reflecting the company's incompetency in delivering quality products was created. The title of the consumer complaint reads, "Bad coffee," and the body text reads, "Starbucks coffee is awful! It always tastes burnt, bitter and acidic. I've heard that some experts say that Starbucks over-roasts their beans…They roast their beans at significantly higher temperatures and in larger batches to shorten roast times. In the process, some of the beans are burnt, which results in a dry, smoky taste. Regardless of the reason, I know the coffee is poor quality and not worth their high prices."

In contrast, in the immorality condition, a consumer complaint reflecting the company's lack of moral standards was created. The title of the complaint reads, "Unethical company," and the body text reads, "The environmentally conscious, neighborhood-friendly, arty appeal of Starbucks is just a façade. They claim to be socially responsible, but it is more like a business tactic than a sincere part of their mission…Fair trade beans only account for a very small percentage of the coffee they sell. This means the vast majority of the coffee sold at Starbucks is grown and picked using underpaid labor." The two complaints appear in Appendix C.

Sample and Procedure

A total of 602 Starbucks consumers were recruited through a panel company, Authentic Response. As of 2011, the panel company managed over three million panel members in the U.S. using a non-probability-based, invitation-only recruitment procedure. The panel members were recruited online from a pool of over 400 websites that included a diverse mix of audiences. The sample for this study was stratified to match key demographics, such as gender and region of residence, within the general population based on national Census data. Of the 602 participants, 51.8% were male and 47.8% female, with the largest portion between the ages of 36-50 (32.5%) and 26-35 (24.2%). The majority of the respondents classified themselves as Caucasian (79.8%) and holding a college degree (37%). On average, they consumed Starbucks coffee 7.5 times per month and have been a Starbucks customer for 6.6 years.

The experiment was administrated online. The panel company sent out an invitation to prospective respondents. A screening question was used to ensure all participants were Starbucks customers. After the screening question, all qualified participants were led to the study site. Upon consenting to the survey, participants were asked to answer questions about their Starbucks consumption (e.g., length of their relationship with the brand and frequency of their Starbucks consumption), communal and exchange relationship scale items, brand commitment items, their existing attitudes towards the brand (pretest), and behavioral intention in the near future (pretest). Then, they were randomly assigned to read either the morality-based negative brand information (i.e., a consumer complaint about the brand's unethical conduct) or the

competence-based negative brand information (i.e., a consumer complaint about the brand's incompetent performance). After viewing the consumer complaint, participants answered the manipulation check questions, the repeated measures of brand attitudes (posttest) and behavioral intention (posttest), and then demographic questions.

Measures

Communal and exchange relationship scales. The communal and exchange relationship scales were adapted from Johnson and Grimm (2010). The two separate multi-item, seven-point scales measured participants' communal or exchange relationship perceptions based on their established relationships with the brand. Six items tapped into the communal relationship perception ($\alpha = .96$), and four items measured the perception of an exchange relationship ($\alpha = .78$). A single index score for each construct was created by averaging the corresponding items. To create the first factor, brand relationship type, the two index scores were dichotomized to create binary classification of relationship types. (See details in the result section.)

Brand commitment. The six-item, seven-point brand commitment scale was adapted from Aaker et al. (2004). It measured the strength of consumer-brand relationships. The items were averaged to create an index score ($\alpha = .90$).

Brand attitude (repeated measure). The three-item repeated measure was adopted from Aggarwal (2004) ($\alpha = .96$). This dependent measure was designed to capture participants' evaluation of the brand on a seven-point scale. Participants answered the set of questions before and after their exposure to negative brand information. The attitude change score was created by taking the before and after difference.

Behavioral intention (repeated measure). The dependent measure, behavioral intention, was measured with two items on a seven-point scale, adapted from Wheeler et al. (2005) (α = .88). The two items captured participants' likelihood of purchasing the brand and recommending the brand to others in the near future. Just as with brand attitude, behavioral intention was measured before and after negative information exposure, and the difference was used to create the behavioral intention change score.

Manipulation check. To assess whether the negative brand incidents described in the two consumer complaints were indeed perceived to be unethical or incompetent based on their corresponding manipulation, participants were asked to rate their perceptions of the action undertaken by the brand that was described in the consumer complaint to be unethical-ethical or incompetent-competent on a seven-point scale (1 = unethical, incompetent; 7 = ethical, competent).

RESULTS

Manipulation Check

To assess the effectiveness of the manipulation of unethical and incompetent brand information, participants were asked to rate the extent to which the consumer complaint that they read concerned unethical or incompetent brand information. As expected, the brand behavior discussed in the consumer complaint concerning unethical practices was perceived to be significantly more unethical than the brand behavior discussed in the consumer complaint concerning incompetent performance ($M_{\text{Unethical}}$= 2.77, $SD_{\text{Unethical}}$ = 1.93; $M_{\text{Incompetent}}$ = 3.07, $SD_{\text{Incompetent}}$ = 1.68; $F(1, 600) = 4.30$, $p < .05$,

η_p^2= .01). Likewise, participants viewed the brand behavior discussed in the consumer complaint about incompetent performance as significantly more incompetent than the brand behavior discussed in the consumer complaint about unethical practices ($M_{\text{Incompetent}}$= 2.62, $SD_{\text{Incompetent}}$ = 1.78; $M_{\text{Unethical}}$ = 4.07, $SD_{\text{Unethical}}$ = 1.58; $F(1, 600) = 110.69$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .16$).

Categorization of Communal and Exchange Relationships

To understand how exchange and communal relationships relate in the real world setting, descriptive and correlation analyses were performed using the communal and exchange index scores. The results showed that communal and exchange relationship scores were positively correlated, and the strength of the relationship between these two variables was considered moderate ($M_{\text{Comm.}}$ = 4.09, $SD_{\text{Comm.}}$ = 1.55; $M_{\text{Exch.}}$ = 5.12, $SD_{\text{Exch.}}$ = 1.00; $r(160) = .47$, $p < .001$). In line with the findings of Study 1 and Johnson and Grimm (2010), the positive correlation suggested that communal and exchange norms are not mutually exclusive and thus both norms could coexist in a given brand relationship.

To test the hypotheses proposed by the study, communal norm- and exchange norm-oriented participants were then identified for the brand relationship type factor. Using median splits for binary classifications of communal and exchange relationships, four relationship quadrants were created (See Figure 9.1). The first quadrant consisted of exchange norm-oriented individuals who had dominant exchange relationships with the brand (i.e., high exchange relationship and low communal relationship scores) (N= 105), and the fourth quadrant was made up of individuals who had dominant communal

relationships with the brand (i.e., high communal relationship and low exchange relationship scores) (N= 108). Individuals whose communal and exchange relationships were both strong constituted the second quadrant (i.e., high involvement) (N= 185) while those whose communal and exchange relationships were both weak constituted the third quadrant (i.e., low involvement) (N= 204). A total number of 213 participants who fell into either the first quadrant or the fourth quadrant, representing either exchange norm-oriented or communal norm-oriented consumers, respectively, were selected for further hypothesis testing.

To ensure the selected participants indeed correctly reflected their corresponding norm orientations, additional correlation analysis and *t*-tests were conducted. According to correlation analysis, the exchange and communal relationship scores were negatively correlated ($r(211) = -.64$, $p < 0.001$) as predicted by the relationship categorization. Further, the *t*-test results indicated that the exchange norm-oriented participants exhibited a higher rating on the exchange index than did the communal norm-oriented participants ($M_{Exch.} = 5.71$, $SD_{Exch.} = .43$; $M_{Comm.} = 4.59$, $SD_{Comm.} = .44$, $t(211) = 18.92$, $p < .001$, $d = 2.57$). Similarly, the communal norm-oriented participants scored higher on the communal norm scale than did the exchange norm-oriented participants ($M_{Comm.} = 4.78$, $SD_{Comm.} = .54$; $M_{Exch.} = 2.80$, $SD_{Exch.} = .93$, $t(211) = 19.09$, $p < .001$, $d = 2.60$). Although the pattern of relationship norm scores was in the predicted direction, it is worth mentioning that, on average, the participants with a strong communal norm orientation still held a fairly high exchange norm score ($M = 4.59$) that was above the mid-point of the seven-point scale. This finding supported the conceptualization that consumer-brand

relationships are inherently exchange-based at their core with communal components layered on the top for consumers in communal relationships with a brand.

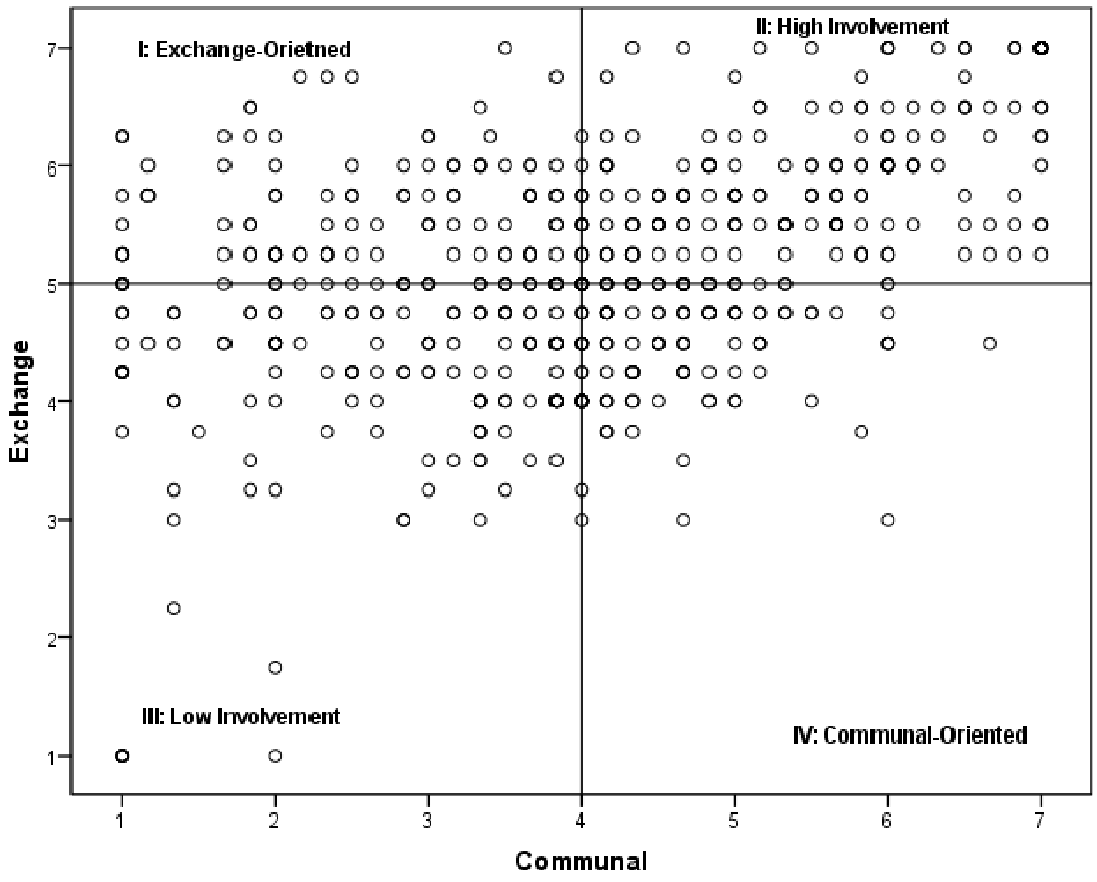

Figure 9.1: Categorization of Communal and Exchange Relationships

Hypothesis Testing

Two-way ANOVAs (analyses of variance) examined the hypotheses for the two dependent variables—attitude change and behavioral intention change. For the relationship type factor, exchange norm-oriented and communal norm-oriented participants were identified using the binary categorization described above. Index scores

for the two dependent variables, changes in attitude and in behavioral intention, were created by subtracting the posttest scores obtained after subjects' exposure to negative information about Starbucks from the pretest scores obtained before the exposure. Thus, a positive change score indicated a negative shift in brand attitude or behavioral intention (i.e., the pretest attitude and behavior scores were higher than the posttest attitude and behavior scores).

In terms of attitude change, the results of the first ANOVA revealed no significant main effects for either relationship type ($M_{\text{Comm.}} = 1.48$, $M_{\text{Exch.}} = 1.37$; $F(1, 209) = .24$, $p = .63$) or negative information type ($M_{\text{Unethical}} = 1.54$, $M_{\text{Incompetent}} = 1.31$; $F(1, 209) = 1.50$, $p = .22$). However, the relationship type × negative information type interaction was marginally significant for attitude change ($F(1, 209) = 3.04$, $p = .08$, $\eta_p^2 = .02$). To further examine the interaction effect, orthogonal planned contrasts were conducted. For communal norm-oriented participants, the unethical and incompetent brand information did not induce different impacts on their attitude change ($M_{\text{Unethical}} = 1.42$, $M_{\text{Incompetent}} = 1.52$; $F(1, 209) = .14$, $p = .71$). Yet exchange norm-oriented participants' attitudes toward the brand dropped significantly more when they were exposed to the unethical brand information than when they were exposed to the incompetent brand information ($M_{\text{Unethical}} = 1.67$, $M_{\text{Incompetent}} = 1.09$; $F(1, 209) = 4.35$, $p < .05$).

The second ANOVA focused on the change of behavioral intention. The results again revealed no significant main effects for either relationship type ($M_{\text{Comm.}} = .42$, $M_{\text{Exch.}} = .38$; $F(1, 209) = .02$, $p = .90$) or negative brand information type ($M_{\text{Unethical}} = .55$, $M_{\text{Incompetent}} = .26$; $F(1, 209) = 2.44$, $p = .12$). A significant interaction effect of relationship

type × negative information type was observed ($F(1, 209) = 3.95$, $p < .05$, $\eta_p^2 = .02$). Similarly, orthogonal planned contrasts were conducted to further investigate the interaction. For communal norm-oriented participants, the unethical and incompetent brand information created no different impact on the change of their behavioral intention ($M_{\text{Unethical}} = .38$, $M_{\text{Incompetent}} = .46$; $F(1, 209) = .29$, $p = .76$). However, for exchange norm-oriented participants, the unethical brand information induced a greater behavioral intention change in the negative direction than the incompetent brand information did ($M_{\text{Unethical}} = .73$, $M_{\text{Incompetent}} = .06$; $F(1, 209) = 6.21$, $p < .05$).

Next, ANCOVAs (analyses of covariance) further tested the hypotheses with brand commitment as a covariate for the two dependent variables. However, brand commitment did not exert any significant influence on either attitude change ($F(1, 208) = .01$, $p = .91$) or behavioral intention change ($F(1, 208) = 1.90$, $p = .17$). The patterns of ANOVA results remained the same while brand commitment was controlled for.

To summarize, brand commitment did not account for significant variance of either dependent variable. The interaction patterns of attitude and behavioral intention changes were similar for both dependent variables. For communal norm-oriented participants, unethical and incompetent brand information had the same negative impact on their attitude as well as on their behavioral intention. Contrary to the prediction, unethical brand information exerted greater impact on attitude and behavioral changes for exchange norm-oriented consumers. Therefore, both H3a and H3b were not supported.

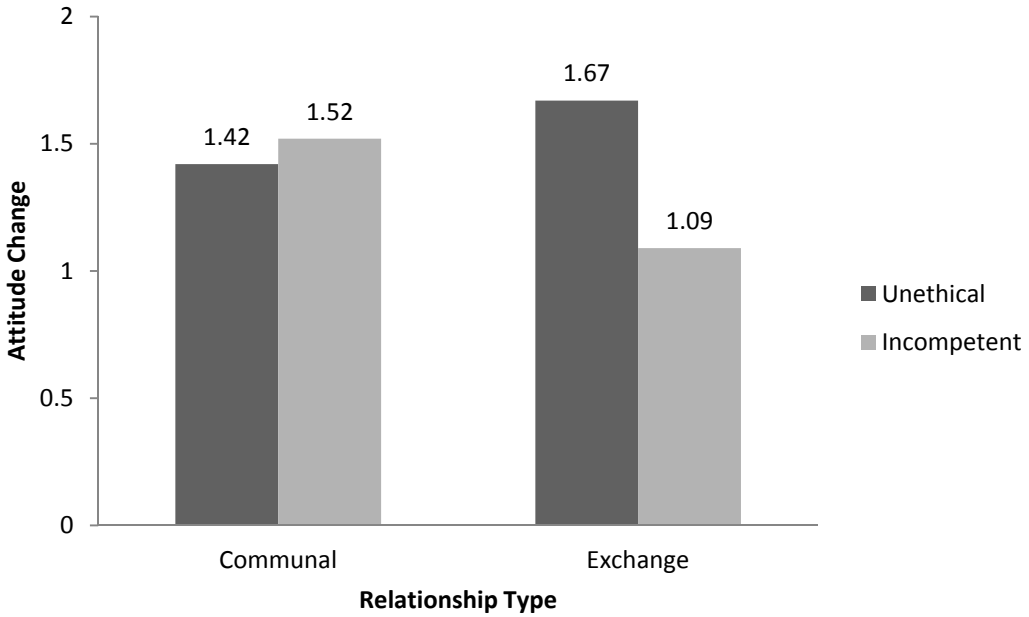

Figure 9.2: Attitude Change as a Function of Relationship Type and Negative Information

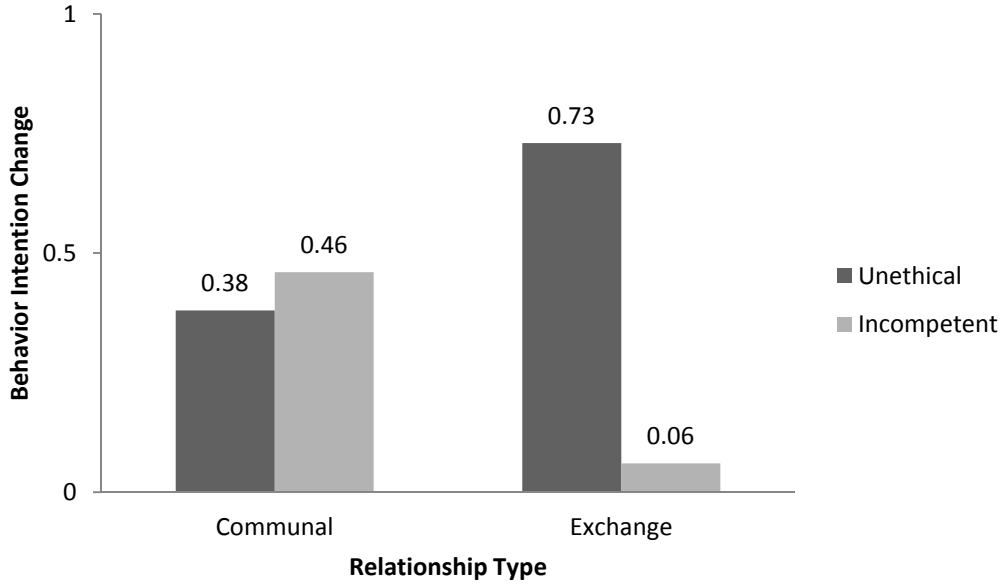

Figure 9.3: Behavioral Intention Change as a Function of Relationship Type and Negative Information

DISCUSSION

Following the framework of matching effect of attitude revision, Study 3 proposed that people are more likely to undergo attitude and behavioral revision when there is a match between the basis of the attitude and the content of the counter-attitudinal information (Edwards & von Hippel, 1995; Pham & Muthukrishnan, 2002). In other words, consumers in communal relationships with a brand are more susceptible to unethical brand information than to incompetent brand information because moral judgments are the basis of their brand attitude and behavioral intention. However, the opposite is true for consumers in exchange relationships with a brand. Competence-based judgment is dominant in exchange relationships, and thus, exchange norm-oriented consumers are more likely to revise their attitude and behavioral intention when they are exposed to incompetent brand information.

However, such matching effect of attitude and behavior revision was not supported in this study. The study results showed other interesting patterns of attitudinal and behavioral revision. For participants who had communal relationships with the coffee brand, both unethical and incompetent brand information had an equally negative impact on the revision of their attitude as well as on their behavioral intention. Furthermore, contrary to the matching effect, unethical brand information induced greater impact on attitudinal and behavioral change for participants who had exchange relationships with a brand.

One explanation for these findings could be based on the "mismatching effect" of attitude revision found by some researchers (Millar & Millar, 1990; Millar & Tesser,

1992). The notion is that when a disconfirming message directly matches the underlying nature of the attitude, the message threatens the way in which the consumer has typically thought about the brand and thus challenges the validity of the consumer's evaluation by a direct contradiction of his or her beliefs or feelings or by pointing out aspects of the brand that he or she failed to consider. This threat or embarrassment could motivate the consumer to counterargue the message to protect his or her existing attitude and behavioral intention. In contrast, when the negative information does not directly match the underlying nature of the attitude, the information does not threaten the existing attitude, and thus, the consumer is more likely to accept the negative information and revise his or her attitude and behavior accordingly.

The study results supported the mismatching hypothesis. The findings revealed that unethical brand information creates greater impact on attitudinal and behavioral revision than incompetent information for exchange norm-oriented consumers does because such information does not directly compete with their fundamental beliefs or feelings about the brand and, in turn, results in greater message acceptance and judgment revision. Similarly, the same logic also explains the lack of differential impact of the two types of negative brand information on attitudinal and behavioral revision for communal norm-oriented consumers. Some empirical evidence suggests that communal norm-oriented consumers process morality- and competence-based brand information concurrently when they evaluate a brand (see Study 1). This occurs because all business relationships are inherently exchange-like, but communal norms lead these individuals to place additional focus on moral information about the brand (Aggarwal, 2004; Johnson &

Grimm, 2010). Therefore, due to such dual processing of both types of brand information, it is possible that communal norm-oriented consumers could draw from their existing morality- and competence-based brand knowledge to counterargue either type of negative brand information. As a result, morality-based and competence-based negative brand information shows no differential influence on judgment revision for consumers who are communal norm-oriented.

Chapter 10: Discussion

Past brand relationship studies have shown that identifying various relationship types and forms could offer marketers more precise predictions of how consumers might encode, interpret, and react to marketers' branding efforts (Fournier, 2009). Different relationship types possess their own distinctive relational templates (or relationship norms). Communal brand relationships are characterized by mutual concerns and have a focus that transcends self-interest and profit maximization, whereas exchange relationships are represented by typical marketing transactions that focus on equal reciprocity and cost-benefit trading between brands and consumers (Aggarwal, 2004). Such a distinction denotes that consumers hold different expectations for brands under different norms and that their interactions with brands are often guided by the rules salient in a given relationship (Aggarwal, 2004). Depending on the relationship norms salient at the point of brand interaction, consumers place different emphases on the types of brand information they attend to (Aggarwal, 2009; Aggarwal & Law, 2005).

Social cognition research suggests that people universally process social information and judge other's social behavior along two fundamental dimensions—morality and competence (Fiske, et al., 2006). The morality dimension is represented by traits such as sincerity, honesty, and ethical behavior, whereas the competence dimension includes traits such as efficiency, reliability, and capability (Wojciszke, 1994). By integrating these two lines of theoretical traditions—relationship norms and social cognition—this dissertation research was built on the main premise that, due to the compatibility of the goals of communal/exchange relationships and morality/competence

social cognition, consumers in a communal relationship with a brand are more likely to evaluate the brand in morality terms, and consumers in an exchange relationship with a brand are more likely to judge the brand in competence terms. Three experiments were conducted to test this main premise.

The purpose of this chapter is to summarize the key findings of the empirical investigations, to discuss the implications and contributions of the findings, to present the limitations of the studies, and to conclude the dissertation by suggesting directions for future research.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

The central tenet of this research was that the communal norms are associated with the morality dimension of social information processing and exchange norms are associated with the competence dimension of social information processing. This postulation received partial empirical support in Study 1. The findings of Study 1 demonstrated that, compared to exchange norm-oriented consumers, communal norm-oriented consumers indeed engage in more morality-based social information processing and place greater emphasis on a brand's moral attributes, such as its business ethics and corporate citizenship, when evaluating the brand. However, such asymmetry in processing brand information between communal norm-oriented and exchange norm-oriented consumers does not exist for competence-related brand information. The findings suggested that both exchange norm-oriented and communal norm-oriented consumers equally value the importance of competence-related attributes.

One possible explanation for the lack of asymmetry in processing competence-related brand information between communal norm-oriented and exchange norm-oriented consumers is that there is something unique about brand relationships. Unlike interpersonal relationships, consumer-brand relationships are inherently exchange-like because they involve cost-benefit transactions between consumers and brands. Consumers engage in transactions with brands with the expectation of getting services or goods in return for their spent resources (Aggarwal, 2004). As suggested by Johnson and Grimm (2010), consumers' perceptions of communal and exchange relationships are separate, distinct constructs because they are not mutually exclusive or polar opposites. Rather, consumers can perceive both norms coexisting in a consumer-brand relationship. For brands that promote an emphasis on consumer well-being, their relationships with consumers are exchange-based at their core with the communal component layered on the top. As a result, communal norm-oriented consumers have a tendency to process morality-related or competence-related brand information at the same time. Hence, consumers in communal relationships with a brand consider information indicating a brand's competency to be important just as their exchange counterparts do.

To extend the study implications to an advertising context and provide additional substantiation of the central tenet of this research, Study 2 tested the postulation that the matching of an advertising message with the processing tendency in a given relationship increases consumers' positive evaluation of the advertisement and of the advertised brand. That is, while communal norm-oriented individuals would respond more favorably to a sincerity-framed advertising message, exchange norm-oriented individuals would

prefer a competence-framed advertising message. The results of Study 2 supported this postulation. The findings demonstrate the significant impact of heightened relationship norms through the priming procedure on the effectiveness of advertising framing and provide evidence of the communal-morality and the exchange-competence associations of social information processing. Together, Studies 1 and 2 suggest that competence-based information processing dominates in an exchange relationship. Thus, exchange norm-oriented consumers evaluate brands mainly in competence terms and prefer brands with competent images. In contrast, both forms of competence- and morality-based information processing exist in communal relationships. As a result, compared to exchange norm-oriented consumers, communal norm-oriented consumers place an additional focus on a brand's morality when evaluating the brand and show greater preference for brands with sincere images.

Since morality-based (e.g., unethical practices) and competence-based (e.g., product defects) negative brand information are common in today's marketplace, Study 3 further tested how relationship norms and their corresponding information processing tendencies influence consumers' responses to these two types of negative brand information. Following the matching effect assumption of attitude change (Pham & Muthukrishnan, 2002), Study 3 predicted that consumers in communal relationships with a brand would be more susceptible to morality-based negative brand information, whereas consumers in exchange relationship with a brand would be more likely to revise their brand attitudes in the face of competence-based negative information. This is because these consumers' relationships with brands are built on moral or competent

trusts, respectively. Surprisingly, Study 3 did not support the postulation of matching effect of attitude change. The results showed that for communal norm-oriented consumers, both unethical and incompetent information about the brand had an equally negative impact on their attitude and behavioral intention. Contrary to the matching hypothesis, unethical information about the brand induced greater impact on attitudinal and behavioral change for exchange norm-oriented consumers than for communal norm-oriented consumers.

One possible explanation for the Study 3 findings could be based on the "mismatching effect" of attitude revision found by some researchers (Millar & Millar, 1990; Millar & Tesser, 1992). This notion is that when a disconfirming message directly matches the underlying nature of the attitude, the message threatens the way in which the consumer has typically thought about the brand and thus challenges the adequacy of the consumer's appraisal by a direct contradiction of his or her beliefs or feelings or by pointing out aspects of the object that he or she failed to consider. The threat could motivate the consumer to counterargue the message to protect his or her existing attitude. In contrast, when the negative information does not directly match the underlying nature of the attitude, the information does not threaten the existing attitude, and thus, the consumer is more likely to accept the negative information and revise his or her attitude and behavior accordingly. Hence, consistent with the "mismatching effect," the findings reveal that unethical information about a brand creates a greater impact on attitudinal and behavioral revision than incompetent information creates for exchange norm-oriented consumers because such information does not directly compete with their fundamental

beliefs about the brand and, in turn, results in greater message acceptance and judgment revision. Similarly, the same logic also explains the pattern found for communal norm-oriented consumers. As the results of Study 1 suggest, communal norm-oriented consumers draw from both types of information when making a brand evaluation. Thus, they could rely on the morality- and competence-based information they have learned about the brand in the past to counterargue the new morality- and competence-based negative information. Such a dual information processing tendency results in the lack of differential impact of the two types of negative brand information on attitudinal and behavioral revision.

One might wonder why the mismatching effect of attitude and behavioral intention change was found in Study 3 rather than the matching effect that was originally proposed. One possible explanation lies in the methodological differences between past matching effect studies and the current study in terms of how the attitudes and behavioral intentions were measured. A number of experiments demonstrating matching effects have used manipulations in which participants were first exposed to a fictitious product to form their initial attitudes and then were presented with an argument that challenged the previously created attitudes (e.g., Edwards, 1990; Edwards & von Hippel, 1995). In other words, in those studies, participants' initial attitudes and behavioral intentions are created based on novel objects with which they have had no direct experiences. Therefore, when encountering an argument that matches the basis of their initial attitudes, these individuals have little knowledge to rely on for generating counterarguments; additionally, the new matched negative information renders itself more diagnostic than

the mismatched information. As a result, matched negative information leads to great attitudinal and behavioral revision. In contrast, a real brand, Starbucks, was used in Study 3, and on average, these participants have been Starbucks consumers for 6.6 years. This suggests that these individuals have relatively strong attitude certainty and ample past experience to use for counterarguments when the bases of attitudes are challenged by matched negative information (Fabrigar & Petty, 1999). Thus, the observed mismatching effect in this research could potentially be attributed to the nature of brand knowledge and experience the subjects hold.

IMPLICATIONS AND CONTRIBUTIONS

This research contributes to the advertising and consumer psychology literature on several fronts. While little research, if any, has looked into the associations of relationship norms with the types of social information processing, the findings from the three experiments have provided convergent evidence that relationship norms moderate the types of brand information that consumers attend to in a given brand relationship.

Past research has found that people universally evaluate others' social behaviors in either morality terms or competence terms. The tendency of engaging in morality or competence information processing depends on the perceiver's cognitive and motivational goals. When people have the motivation to process information pertinent to a particular goal, they evaluate others' behaviors more on the goal-compatible traits (Hilton & Darley, 1991). Hence, when evaluating the same social object, people that are given a morality-relevant goal are more attentive to morality information, whereas people that are given a competence-relevant goal are more attentive to competence information

about the target person (Wojciszke, 1997; Wojciszke, et al., 1998). This research extends the premise of goal-compatible information processing in the interpersonal context to the consumer-brand relationship setting. More specifically, the prominent goal of an exchange relationship is to pursue equivalent inputs and outputs and to maximize economic productivity (Deutsch, 1975). Such a goal renders competence information more accessible for consumers in the exchange relationships with a brand because these consumers concern about their self-interest and the cost-benefit exchange for a brand to deliver desirable outcomes. Therefore, consumers in exchange relationships with a brand mainly evaluate the brand in competence terms. In contrast, communal brand relationships operate on a need basis in additional to the equity principle (Johnson & Grimm, 2010). Members in communal relationships provide benefit to one another based on concerns for others' welfare. Hence, consumers expect brands that engage in communal relationships with them not only deliver quality products and services but also demonstrate mutual cares and empathy for them. As a result, consumers in communal relationships with a brand place additional focus on the brand's morality and ethics when they process and evaluate brand actions.

In addition to the theoretical contributions of relating relationship norms to consumers' social information tendencies, this research also has several marketing implications. First, the different emphasis on morality and competence information in communal and exchange relationships provides an important foundation for marketers to create effective advertising strategies. Brands are often portrayed as having a sincere or a competent image in advertisements (Aaker, 1997). While a print advertisement only

provides limited space for brand information, effective messaging framing, with a focus on a brand's sincere (e.g., socially responsible brand) or competent image (e.g., intelligent and successful brand), can elicit differential consumer responses to advertising, thus influencing the advertisement's effectiveness among its target consumers.

Second, consumers are commonly exposed to morality-based (e.g., unethical practices) and competence-based (e.g., product functionality issues) negative brand information in today's marketplace (Pullig, et al., 2006), but little research has been conducted to shed light on whether and how consumers respond to this information. This research demonstrates a mismatching effect, meaning that consumers' attitudes are more likely to change when they encounter negative information that does not match the basis of their initial attitude. Specifically, unethical information about a brand has greater impact on exchange norm-oriented consumers' attitudinal and behavioral revision because these consumers' initial attitudes are built upon their trust in the brand's competence, which leads them to be more defenseless when they are exposed to novel, immoral information about the brand. In contrast, communal norm-oriented consumers' initial attitudes are based on moral as well as competent brand information. As a result, both types of negative information have the same impact on their attitudinal and behavioral revision.

From the managerial perspective, the research findings suggest that creating a communal brand could be a double-bladed sword for marketers. Although past research suggests that companies that foster communal relationships with consumers by engaging

in CSR (corporate social reasonability) activities could lead to favorable outcomes, such as improved brand images (Porter & Kramer, 2002), increased purchase intention (Ross, Patterson, & Stutts, 1992), and brand loyalty (van den Brink, Odekerken-Schröder, & Pauwels, 2006), the findings of present research indicate that, despite of all the benefits, consumers also have higher standards for these brands by taking in account both their competency and their moral conduct when forming their initial judgments and in revising their attitudes in the face of negative brand information.

Furthermore, although these three experiments are similar in terms of the constructs studied, the methods used for the three studies are different and are designed to provide opportunities for comparison among the methods. Past research suggests that communal and exchange norms can be situationally made salient at the point of brand interaction as well as measured to reflect a stable relationship pattern in an established brand relationship (Aggarwal, 2004; Johnson & Grimm, 2010). To compare these two methods, priming tasks and norm measurement were both employed: priming scenarios describing consumers interacting with fictitious brands were used in Studies 1 and 2, and communal/exchange norms were directly measured and dichotomized in Study 3. The findings with the priming procedures provide further support that the effects of relationship norms may nevertheless be observed in the absence of actual long-term relationships, because either communal or exchange norms could be made accessible through situational stimulation. However, in reality, when the norms of a given relationship are measured as in Study 3, consumers often demonstrate a mixture of

communal or exchange perceptions about the brand, suggesting the coexistence of two norms within a single relationship.

LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

While different brands were included in the three experiments with the intention of making the research findings generalizable (i.e., a fictitious wireless service brand for Study 1, a banking brand for Study 2, and a real brand, Starbucks, for Study 3), the product categories used for this research are still limited to service domains, in which consumers have a good amount of opportunities to interact with sales agents or customer representatives. Although the research findings suggest that the conceptualization of brand relationship norms is a generalizable phenomenon for service categories, one might argue that the interpersonal element associated with service brands render relationship norms more accessible for these brands compared to other purely produce-centric categories, such as stationery, beverage, or cleaning products, where interpersonal interactions with brands are limited. Therefore, further research with a larger set of product categories is needed to better identify the degree of generalizability of the findings.

Another area of future research pertains to other potential moderators of the effect of negative information on attitude revision for consumers in different types of brand relationships. While cautious efforts were made to ensure that the morality-based and competence-based negative information used in Study 3 indeed reflected their corresponding negative values, the nature of the incidents mentioned in these two scenarios were somewhat different. The morality-based negative information pertained to

the brand's unethical conduct of exploiting labor in developing countries, whereas the competence-related negative information concerned the bad taste and quality of the coffee. The former might be perceived as less personally relevant given that consumers might not have direct connections with a situation involving exploited labor; however, the latter might be considered as more directly relevant to their experiences as all the consumers have consumed and tasted Starbucks coffee before. As a result, the manipulations of negative brand information confounded the morality/competence distinction with direct and indirect personal relevance. Some studies have identified direct and indirect experience associated with counterattitudinal information to be a potential moderator to attitude revision (Fabrigar & Petty, 1999; Messe, Bodenhausen, & Nelson, 1995; Millar, 1992). Therefore, additional research is warranted to understand the mechanism that links brand relationship types to attitude revision when consumers are confronted with different forms of negative information.

Based on the insights regarding the associations of relationship norms with morality or competent social cognition, another direction in which future research would be both insightful and important would be to conduct a series of studies examining the long-term impact of two types of negative publicity on consumer-brand relationships. Research in attribution theories suggests that there are inherent differences in the way people assess negative information in the morality and competence domains, resulting in a negativity bias in the morality domain and a positivity bias in the competence domain (Wojciszke, Brycz, et al., 1993). In the interpersonal context, people intuitively believe that individuals with high moral standards will refrain from immoral behaviors in any

circumstances, whereas individuals with low moral standards may exhibit either immoral or moral behaviors depending on situational incentives (e.g., ethical people such as priests should refrain from any immoral acts, but hooligans might do good when situation is called for). In contrast, the opposite asymmetry is presumed for competence-related traits, because people tend to believe that individuals with high ability are capable of exhibiting performance at all levels (from poor to high), depending on situational demands, whereas those with lesser ability can only achieve low performance (e.g., capable sports players can perform badly, but incapable players can't perform well)(Reeder & Brewer, 1979). As a result, a single immoral act is considered to offer a reliable indicator of low morality, whereas a single incompetent act is considered to be less diagnostic. Future research could examine whether this asymmetrical perception of immoral and unethical information is applicable in the context of commercial relationships. Further, given the associations of exchange norms with competence cognition and communal norms with morality cognition, further research is warranted to investigate how the interplay between asymmetrical perceptions and the social information processing associated with a given brand relationship could cause different degrees of relationship damage. Findings along this line of research will advance the theoretical and practical understanding of the process of brand relationship deterioration as well as the development of effective recovery strategies for advertisers when they encounter negative publicity.

Appendix A: Stimuli and Measures for Study 1

NORM PRIMING SCENARIOS

Communal Prime

[Instruction] We are working with a mobile service company to explore consumer behavior in this particular service domain. In order not to bias your perception, the real brand name is not revealed and 'Brand X' is used to refer to the company. Below is a situation that describes your interaction with the brand. It is important that you read the following scenario carefully and imagine you are a Brand X customer reflecting the scenario when you proceed to the next page and answer questions.

You have been using Brand X's mobile service for the past few years. You have used their service quite extensively, and you have been very happy with the quality of their services. When you first came to UT, your parents took you to the cellular phone store and purchased a phone for you as a gift. You still remember how thrilled you were when you got the phone of the latest fashion. You have always associated Brand X with positive feelings since Brand X reminds you of your parents and you use their service to connect with your family and friends.

Brand X has always treated you well and accommodated your needs. You feel that Brand X puts customer satisfaction ahead of everything else. For instance, over the past few years, whenever you had problems with your phone, the customer service representatives on the phone or in the store were always friendly and helpful. They seem to take a personal interest in you because they listen to your problems carefully. Most importantly, your issues have been resolved without costing you anything extra. As a student on a tight budget, you really appreciate the help that their service agents have offered, and the friendly service of Brand X has made you feel that they will be there for you whenever you are in need.

Unlike other companies whose goal is to pursue profit maximization, you feel Brand X really devotes its resources to ensuring consumer well-being. They are very careful with user data and protect customer privacy from being exploited for marketing purposes. In addition, you know that Brand X has engaged in various community support initiatives, such as making donations to college funds, supporting high school drop-out prevention, and promoting programs for environmental sustainability. Overall, your experience with Brand X has been pleasant and memorable, and you have been impressed by its efforts in corporate citizenship.

Exchange Prime

[Instruction] We are working with a mobile service company to explore consumer behavior in this particular service domain. In order not to bias your perception, the real brand name is not revealed and 'Brand X' is used to refer to the company. Below is a situation that describes your interaction with the brand. It is important that you read the following scenario carefully and imagine you are a Brand X customer reflecting the scenario when you proceed to the next page and answer questions.

You have been using Brand X's mobile service for the past few years. You have used their service quite extensively, and you have been very happy with the quality of their services. They have the most reliable wireless network and the best coverage in the nation. In fact, compared to other wireless service providers that you have used, Brand X provides the best call quality and rarely drops your calls. In addition, Brand X always provides you with the latest phone models to select from when you renew your contract.

Although Brand X charges higher prices for its plans, they do offer better service than its competitors. In fact, you always feel you get what you pay for with Brand X. Higher prices come with better services. Their technical support is also the best in the market. In the past, whenever you have had problems with your phone, you have always gotten your issues resolved very quickly in the store or online. Their employees seem to be quite well-trained, formal, and professional— they respect your time and get the job done fast. Although you had to pay to get your issues resolved, you have been happy that you always get your money's worth when doing business with Brand X.

Like most of the companies in the market, you feel Brand X's goal is to pursue profit maximization. At the heart of Brand X's growth is its reliability and efficiency in delivering equal value and service for every dollar that customers spend. To ensure its competitive advantage, Brand X periodically upgrades their technology and innovates their products to meet customer standards. Overall, your experience with Brand X has been excellent, and you have been impressed by their professionalism.

MANIPULATION CHECK

Relationship Norm Activation Scale

[Instruction] Considering your reaction to the brand interaction scenario you just read, to what extent do you agree or disagree with each of the statements regarding your perception of Brand X.

Communal Brand Relationship Norms

1. I have warm feelings about Brand X.
   Strongly disagree: _1_ : _2_ : _3_ : _4_ : _5_ : _6_ : _7_ : Strongly agree

2. Brand X will help me in times of need.
   Strongly disagree: _1_ : _2_ : _3_ : _4_ : _5_ : _6_ : _7_ : Strongly agree

3. I would miss Brand X if they were out of business.
   Strongly disagree: _1_ : _2_ : _3_ : _4_ : _5_ : _6_ : _7_ : Strongly agree

4. The way Brand X treats me makes me feel special.
   Strongly disagree: _1_ : _2_ : _3_ : _4_ : _5_ : _6_ : _7_ : Strongly agree

5. Brand X cares about me.
   Strongly disagree: _1_ : _2_ : _3_ : _4_ : _5_ : _6_ : _7_ : Strongly agree

6. Brand X likes me.
   Strongly disagree: _1_ : _2_ : _3_ : _4_ : _5_ : _6_ : _7_ : Strongly agree

7. I care for Brand X.
   Strongly disagree: _1_ : _2_ : _3_ : _4_ : _5_ : _6_ : _7_ : Strongly agree

Exchange Brand Relationship Norms

1. Brand X provides good value for money.

   Strongly disagree: _1_ : _2_ : _3_ : _4_ : _5_ : _6_ : _7_ : Strongly agree

2. I get my money's worth by doing business with Brand X.
   Strongly disagree: _1_ : _2_ : _3_ : _4_ : _5_ : _6_ : _7_ : Strongly agree

3. Brand X provides services just to get business.
   Strongly disagree: _1_ : _2_ : _3_ : _4_ : _5_ : _6_ : _7_ : Strongly agree

Brand Personification

[Instruction] Imagine Brand X coming alive and becoming a person. Please rate the extent to which the brand would be like as a person.

1. A close friend
   Not at all: _1_ : _2_ : _3_ : _4_ : _5_ : _6_ : _7_ : Very much

2. A family member
   Not at all: _1_ : _2_ : _3_ : _4_ : _5_ : _6_ : _7_ : Very much

3. A business person
   Not at all: _1_ : _2_ : _3_ : _4_ : _5_ : _6_ : _7_ : Very much

4. A merchant
   Not at all: _1_ : _2_ : _3_ : _4_ : _5_ : _6_ : _7_ : Very much

PRODUCT DESCRIPTION

[Instruction] Next, we are interested in your opinion on a different brand in another service category—Internet & DSL service. Please read the following product description carefully before answering the questions that follow.

"Brand Y" is a DSL provider for home Internet service. Recently, they have decided to launch a new campaign to strengthen their brand image. According to their marketing plan, they will use the list of brand information below to position their brand in the campaign. These reasons set Brand Y apart from other DSL Internet service providers:

- *Backed by our years of experience, Brand Y provides the most reliable DSL Internet service in the nation.* We make sure our customers stay connected – all the time, anytime.

- *Brand Y is committed to protecting consumer rights and privacy.* We do not collect and store unnecessary user data. We strictly forbid selling our user data to any third party services unless approval is given by our customers.

- *Brand Y is the leading innovator in the market.* With the most advanced labs in the industry, the technology we have developed set the standard for our competitors to follow.

- *Brand Y has a clear conscience and good business ethics* when doing business with our customers. We always disclose material and service charges clearly so customers won't be surprised by any hidden fees.

- Brand Y knows how frustrating it can be for our customers if something goes wrong with their Internet access, so we're always here to help. *Users have voted us the most efficient and professional repair service across all other Internet service providers.*

- *We care about our local communities.* Brand Y believes everyone should have access to the Internet in today's world. Our community support program provides discounted plans to make Internet more affordable for low-income families and qualified customers.

DEPENDENT MEASURES

Evaluation of Morality and Competence Brand Attributes

[Instruction] If you were to choose an Internet service provider for yourself, what would be the most important considerations to you? Please indicate the importance of each of the brand attributes mentioned in the product description in deciding whether to use Brand Y.

1. Brand Y is ethical (e.g, honest disclosure of service charges, no hidden fees).
   Unimportant: _1_:_2_:_3_:_4_:_5_:_6_:_7_: Important

2. Brand Y is committed to protection of customer privacy.
   Unimportant: _1_:_2_:_3_:_4_:_5_:_6_:_7_: Important

3. Brand Y provides the most reliable DSL service in the nation.
   Unimportant: _1_:_2_:_3_:_4_:_5_:_6_:_7_: Important

4. Brand Y provides efficient service/device repair and support.
   Unimportant: _1_:_2_:_3_:_4_:_5_:_6_:_7_: Important

5. Brand Y is a leading innovator in the industry.
   Unimportant: _1_:_2_:_3_:_4_:_5_:_6_:_7_: Important

6. Brand Y engages in community outreach programs (i.e., makes Internet affordable to local customers in need).
   Unimportant: _1_:_2_:_3_:_4_:_5_:_6_:_7_: Important

Brand Attitude

[Instruction] Considering your reaction to the description you just read, please select the corresponding number that adequately describes your overall evaluation of Brand Y's DSL service.

1. Dislike: _1_:_2_:_3_:_4_:_5_:_6_:_7_: Like
2. Dissatisfied: _1_:_2_:_3_:_4_:_5_:_6_:_7_: Satisfied
3. Unfavorable: _1_:_2_:_3_:_4_:_5_:_6_:_7_: Favorable

Appendix B: Stimuli and Measures for Study 2

NORM PRIMING SCENARIOS

Communal Prime

[Instruction] We are working with a bank to explore consumer behavior in this particular service domain. In order not to bias your perception, the brand name is not revealed and the name 'Synthesis' is used to refer to the brank. Below is a situation that describes your interaction with the bank. It is important that you read that following scenario carefully and imagine that you are a Synthesis customer reflecting the scenario when answering questions.

You have been banking with Synthesis Bank for the past few years. You have used the bank quite extensively and have been very happy with the quality of their services. When you first started college, you went to the local branch with your parents to open your accounts. You still remember how thrilled you were when you got your first credit card there. You have always associated the bank with positive feelings since you often visit the bank to deposit checks whenever you receive money from home.

The bank has always treated you well and accommodated your needs. As a student with limited resources, you really appreciate that they offered to waive their account maintenance and service fees. Over the past few years, whenever you have visited the bank, you have had a very pleasant and warm interaction with their personnel. Their executives seem to take a personal interest in you. They listen to your financial needs carefully and often take the initiative in suggesting ways to better manage your funds. They also periodically hold free educational workshops and seminars to help students to plan their financial futures. Overall, the friendly service of Synthesis has made you feel that they will be there for you whenever you are in need.

You feel that Synthesis Bank, unlike other corporate companies whose goal is only to pursue profit maximization, really devotes its resources to ensuring consumers' well-being. They have strict privacy policy protecting customer data from being exploited for marketing purposes. In addition, you know that Synthesis has engaged in various community support initiatives, such as making donations to college funds and supporting high school drop-out prevention. Overall, your experience with the bank has been pleasant and memorable, and you have been impressed by its customer-centric approach and efforts in corporate citizenship.

Exchange Prime

[Instruction] We are working with a bank to explore consumer behavior in this particular service domain. In order not to bias your perception, the brand name is not revealed and the name 'Synthesis' is used to refer to the brank. Below is a situation that describes your interaction with the bank. It is important that you read that following scenario carefully and imagine that you are a Synthesis customer reflecting the scenario when answering questions.

You have been banking with Synthesis Bank for the past few years. You have used the bank quite extensively and have been very happy with the efficiency of their services. For instance, when you took out a loan from the bank, they handled the paperwork quickly. As one of the largest banks in the nation, you have convenient access to their numerous branches and ATM machines as well as their secure online banking service.

Although Synthesis charges higher prices for their services than other banks of their size, they do offer better banking products than their competitors. In fact, you always feel you get what you pay for with Synthesis. You pay higher annual fees for your credit cards, but the cards offer better reward programs than other credit cards. In the past, whenever you have had issues with your cards, you have gotten your problem properly resolved by calling their customer service line. Their agents seem well-trained, efficient, and professional. Regardless of the service fees they charge, you are happy that you have always gotten your money's worth when doing business with Synthesis Bank.

You believe that Synthesis Bank's goal, like the goal of most corporate companies, is to pursue profit maximization. At the heart of Synthesis Bank's growth is its reliability and efficiency in delivering equal value and service for every dollar that customers spend. To ensure its competitive advantage, Synthesis periodically enhances their products to meet customer standards. Overall, your experience with Synthesis Bank has been excellent, and you have been impressed by their professionalism.

ADVERTISING MESSAGES

Version A: Sincerity-framed Ad

We turn your dreams into reality

On your road to success, you have Synthesis on your side

Your own home. Your dream car. Your perfect wedding. In today's economy, there's no substitute for finding a devoted banker who not only shares your belief in your dreams but also has the passion to make them come true. Most banks try to entice you to use their products with gimmicks. We try an honest and personal approach: you deserve a tailored plan with no hidden agenda that meets your financial needs. It's our priority to get you where you want to be. What matters to you matters to Synthesis too.

SYNTHESIS BANK

Version B: Competence-framed Ad

We turn your concern into confidence

Concrete solutions for your financial future

Paying off your loans. A profitable investment portfolio. A sensible retirement plan. In today's economy, there's no substitute for working with a capable banker who has the experience to lead you toward your brightest possible financial future. It's our priority to bring to the market the most comprehensive and innovative banking products available. With our effective approach to financial planning, you can be confident that you'll have right mix of products in your hands. You'll have the power to get more from your money – the power of Synthesis.

SYNTHESIS BANK

MANIPULATION CHECK

Relationship Norm Activation Scale

[Instruction] Considering your reaction to the brand interaction scenario you just read, to what extent do you agree or disagree with each of the statements regarding your perception of Synthesis Bank.

Communal Brand Relationship Norms

1. I have warm feelings about Synthesis.
   Strongly disagree: _1_ : _2_ : _3_ : _4_ : _5_ : _6_ : _7_ : Strongly agree

2. Synthesis will help me in times of need.
   Strongly disagree: _1_ : _2_ : _3_ : _4_ : _5_ : _6_ : _7_ : Strongly agree

3. I would miss Synthesis if they were out of business.
   Strongly disagree: _1_ : _2_ : _3_ : _4_ : _5_ : _6_ : _7_ : Strongly agree

4. The way Synthesis treats me makes me feel special.
   Strongly disagree: _1_ : _2_ : _3_ : _4_ : _5_ : _6_ : _7_ : Strongly agree

5. Synthesis cares about me.
   Strongly disagree: _1_ : _2_ : _3_ : _4_ : _5_ : _6_ : _7_ : Strongly agree

6. Synthesis likes me.
   Strongly disagree: _1_ : _2_ : _3_ : _4_ : _5_ : _6_ : _7_ : Strongly agree

7. I care for Synthesis.
   Strongly disagree: _1_ : _2_ : _3_ : _4_ : _5_ : _6_ : _7_ : Strongly agree

Exchange Brand Relationship Norms

1. Synthesis provides good value for money.

   Strongly disagree: _1_ : _2_ : _3_ : _4_ : _5_ : _6_ : _7_ : Strongly agree

2. I get my money's worth by doing business with Synthesis.
   Strongly disagree: _1_ : _2_ : _3_ : _4_ : _5_ : _6_ : _7_ : Strongly agree

3. Synthesis provides services just to get business.
   Strongly disagree: _1_ : _2_ : _3_ : _4_ : _5_ : _6_ : _7_ : Strongly agree

Perception of Brand Image

[Instruction] Please indicate your perception of Synthesis' brand image based on your impression of the ad.

1. Synthesis is honest.
   Strongly disagree: _1_ : _2_ : _3_ : _4_ : _5_ : _6_ : _7_ : Strongly agree

2. Synthesis is friendly.
   Strongly disagree: _1_ : _2_ : _3_ : _4_ : _5_ : _6_ : _7_ : Strongly agree

3. Synthesis is intelligent.
   Strongly disagree: _1_ : _2_ : _3_ : _4_ : _5_ : _6_ : _7_ : Strongly agree

4. Synthesis is efficient.
   Strongly disagree: _1_ : _2_ : _3_ : _4_ : _5_ : _6_ : _7_ : Strongly agree

DEPENDENT MEASURES

Ad Attitudes

[Instruction] Considering your reaction to the ad you just read, for each pair of words, please select the corresponding number that adequately describes your overall evaluation of the **AD**.

1. Dislike: _1_ : _2_ : _3_ : _4_ : _5_ : _6_ : _7_ : Like
2. Harmful: _1_ : _2_ : _3_ : _4_ : _5_ : _6_ : _7_ : Beneficial
3. Unfavorable: _1_ : _2_ : _3_ : _4_ : _5_ : _6_ : _7_ : Favorable
4. Negative: _1_ : _2_ : _3_ : _4_ : _5_ : _6_ : _7_ : Positive
5. Unconvincing: _1_ : _2_ : _3_ : _4_ : _5_ : _6_ : _7_ : Convincing

Brand Attitude

[Instruction] Considering your reaction to the ad you just read, for each pair of words, please select the corresponding number that adequately describes your overall evaluation of the **BRAND**.

1. Dislike: _1_ : _2_ : _3_ : _4_ : _5_ : _6_ : _7_ : Like

2. Dissatisfied: _1_ : _2_ : _3_ : _4_ : _5_ : _6_ : _7_ : Satisfied
3. Unfavorable: _1_ : _2_ : _3_ : _4_ : _5_ : _6_ : _7_ : Favorable

Appendix C: Stimuli and Measures for Study 3

BRAND CONSUMPTION EXPERIENCE

[Instruction] Please tell us a little about your coffee consumption in general and your coffee consumption of Starbucks.

1. In general, how often do you consume coffee?
   Approximately_____ times/month
2. How long have you been a customer of Starbucks?
   Approximately _____ year(s) _____month(s)
3. How often do you purchase products or services from Starbucks?
   Approximately_____ times/month

INDEPENDENT VARIABLES AND COVARIATE

Communal and Exchange Relationship Scales

[Instruction] We are interested in your relationship with Starbucks. Please carefully read the following statements and check the appropriate numbers that accurately reflect your answers.

Communal Relationship Scale items

1. I purchase from Starbucks to see them succeed.
   Strongly disagree: _1_ : _2_ : _3_ : _4_ : _5_ : _6_ : _7_ : Strongly agree

2. I purchase from Starbucks to support them.
   Strongly disagree: _1_ : _2_ : _3_ : _4_ : _5_ : _6_ : _7_ : Strongly agree

3. I donate to Starbucks if they need my help.
   Strongly disagree: _1_ : _2_ : _3_ : _4_ : _5_ : _6_ : _7_ : Strongly agree

4. I will help Starbucks to succeed because I want to.
   Strongly disagree: _1_ : _2_ : _3_ : _4_ : _5_ : _6_ : _7_ : Strongly agree

5. I care about Starbucks' success.
   Strongly disagree: _1_ : _2_ : _3_ : _4_ : _5_ : _6_ : _7_ : Strongly agree

6. Starbucks' success will make me happy.
   Strongly disagree: _1_ : _2_ : _3_ : _4_ : _5_ : _6_ : _7_ : Strongly agree

Exchange Relationship Scale Items

1. Starbucks provides services just to get business.

   Strongly disagree: _1_ : _2_ : _3_ : _4_ : _5_ : _6_ : _7_ : Strongly agree

2. When I pay Starbucks, I will receive comparable services or products in return.
   Strongly disagree: _1_ : _2_ : _3_ : _4_ : _5_ : _6_ : _7_ : Strongly agree

3. I pay Starbucks in exchange for their services and products.
   Strongly disagree: _1_ : _2_ : _3_ : _4_ : _5_ : _6_ : _7_ : Strongly agree

4. If I purchase something from Starbucks, I receive services or products from them promptly.
   Strongly disagree: _1_ : _2_ : _3_ : _4_ : _5_ : _6_ : _7_ : Strongly agree

Brand Commitment

[Instruction] We are interested in your feelings associated with Starbucks. Please carefully read the following statements and check the appropriate numbers that accurately reflect your answers.

1. I am very loyal to Starbucks.
   Strongly disagree: _1_ : _2_ : _3_ : _4_ : _5_ : _6_ : _7_ : Strongly agree

2. I am willing to make small sacrifices in order to keep consuming Starbucks coffee.
   Strongly disagree: _1_ : _2_ : _3_ : _4_ : _5_ : _6_ : _7_ : Strongly agree

3. I would be willing to postpone my purchase if Starbucks products or services were temporarily unavailable.
   Strongly disagree: _1_ : _2_ : _3_ : _4_ : _5_ : _6_ : _7_ : Strongly agree

4. I would stick with Starbucks even if it let me down once or twice.
   Strongly disagree: _1_ : _2_ : _3_ : _4_ : _5_ : _6_ : _7_ : Strongly agree

5. I am so happy with Starbucks that I no longer feel the need to keep an eye out for alternatives for their products.
   Strongly disagree: _1_:_2_:_3_:_4_:_5_:_6_:_7_: Strongly agree

6. I am likely to be consuming Starbucks one year from now.
   Strongly disagree: _1_:_2_:_3_:_4_:_5_:_6_:_7_: Strongly agree

PRETEST: DEPENDENT MEASURES

Brand Attitude

[Instruction] Please select the corresponding number that adequately describes your overall evaluation of Starbucks.

1. Dislike: _1_:_2_:_3_:_4_:_5_:_6_:_7_: Like
2. Dissatisfied: _1_:_2_:_3_:_4_:_5_:_6_:_7_: Satisfied
3. Unfavorable: _1_:_2_:_3_:_4_:_5_:_6_:_7_: Favorable

Behavioral Intention

[Instruction] Considering your relationship with Starbucks, please indicate how likely you would do the following activities.

1. How likely would you do business with Starbucks again?
   Very unlikely: _1_:_2_:_3_:_4_:_5_:_6_:_7_: Very likely

2. How likely would you be to recommend Starbucks to others?
   Very unlikely: _1_:_2_:_3_:_4_:_5_:_6_:_7_: Very likely

NEGATIVE BRAND INFORMATION

Incompetent Version

[Instruction] Below is a customer complaint related to Starbucks. Please read the complaint carefully. After you finish reading it, please click the arrow bottom to proceed to the next page.

Bad Coffee

Starbucks coffee is awful! It always tastes burnt, bitter and acidic. I've heard some experts say that Starbucks over-roasts their beans so the only flavor that will result is from the strong roast, which then hides the poor quality of the beans. Others have said that Starbucks doesn't use normal methods to roast their beans. Supposedly, to keep up the production, they roast their beans at significantly higher temperatures and in larger batches to shorten roast times. In the process, some of the beans are burnt, which results in a dry, smoky taste. Regardless of the reason, I know the coffee is poor quality and not worth their high prices. In fact, the bad tasting coffee is the reason Starbucks pushes flavored coffees so hard. The flavors mask the burnt taste! It's not just the coffee itself I have a problem with. I've also noticed that the baristas don't use organic milk to make the espresso drinks. Overall, I don't really think the quality of Starbucks coffees deserves the premium prices they charge their customers. There are many local coffee shops that offer much, much better coffee than Starbucks.

Unethical Version

[Instruction] Below is a customer complaint related to Starbucks. Please read the complaint carefully. After you finish reading it, please click the arrow bottom to proceed to the next page.

Unethical Company

The environmentally conscious, neighborhood-friendly, arty appeal of Starbucks is just a façade. Starbucks is really not your friend. They claim to be socially responsible, but it is more like a business tactic than a sincere part of their mission. Starbucks has dragged their feet on starting to use Fairtrade coffee in the U.S. for years. It took several years of campaigning by the Organic Consumers' Association before Starbucks finally agreed to brew Fairtrade in their store. And even then, Fairtrade beans only account for a very small percentage of the coffee they sell. This means the vast majority of the coffee sold at Starbucks is grown and picked using underpaid labor. And this unethical business practice does not even address their attempts to block Ethiopia from improving the livelihoods of coffee growers. A truly ethical company should be concerned about where their coffee comes from and how it affects the livelihoods that develop on growing coffee beans. Furthermore, the predatory business practices that Starbucks engages in, such as paying landlords to not renew leases for local coffee shops so that a Starbuck store can move in, are completely unethical as well.

MANIPULATION CHECK

[Instruction] We are interested in your reaction to the customer complaint that you just read. Please carefully read the following statements and check the appropriate buttons that accurately reflect your answers.

Considering the complaint you just read, how was the brand described according to the customer?

1. Unethical: _1_:_2_:_3_:_4_:_5_:_6_:_7_: Ethical
2. Incompetent : _1_:_2_:_3_:_4_:_5_:_6_:_7_: Competent

POSTTEST: DEPENDENT MEASURES

Brand Attitude (Repeated Measure)

[Instruction] Considering your reaction to the customer complaint you just saw, for each pair of words below, please select the corresponding number that adequately describes your overall evaluation of the brand.

1. Dislike: _1_:_2_:_3_:_4_:_5_:_6_:_7_: Like
2. Dissatisfied: _1_:_2_:_3_:_4_:_5_:_6_:_7_: Satisfied
3. Unfavorable: _1_:_2_:_3_:_4_:_5_:_6_:_7_: Favorable

Behavioral Intention (Repeated Measure)

[Instruction] Considering your reaction to the customer complaint you just saw, please indicate how likely you would do the following activities.

1. How likely would you do business with Starbucks again?
   Very unlikely: _1_:_2_:_3_:_4_:_5_:_6_:_7_: Very likely

2. How likely would you be to recommend Starbucks to others?
   Very unlikely: _1_:_2_:_3_:_4_:_5_:_6_:_7_: Very likely

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